

The Sith Resurgence

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The Sith Resurgence

by [CD_Call](#), [MikailaT](#)

Summary

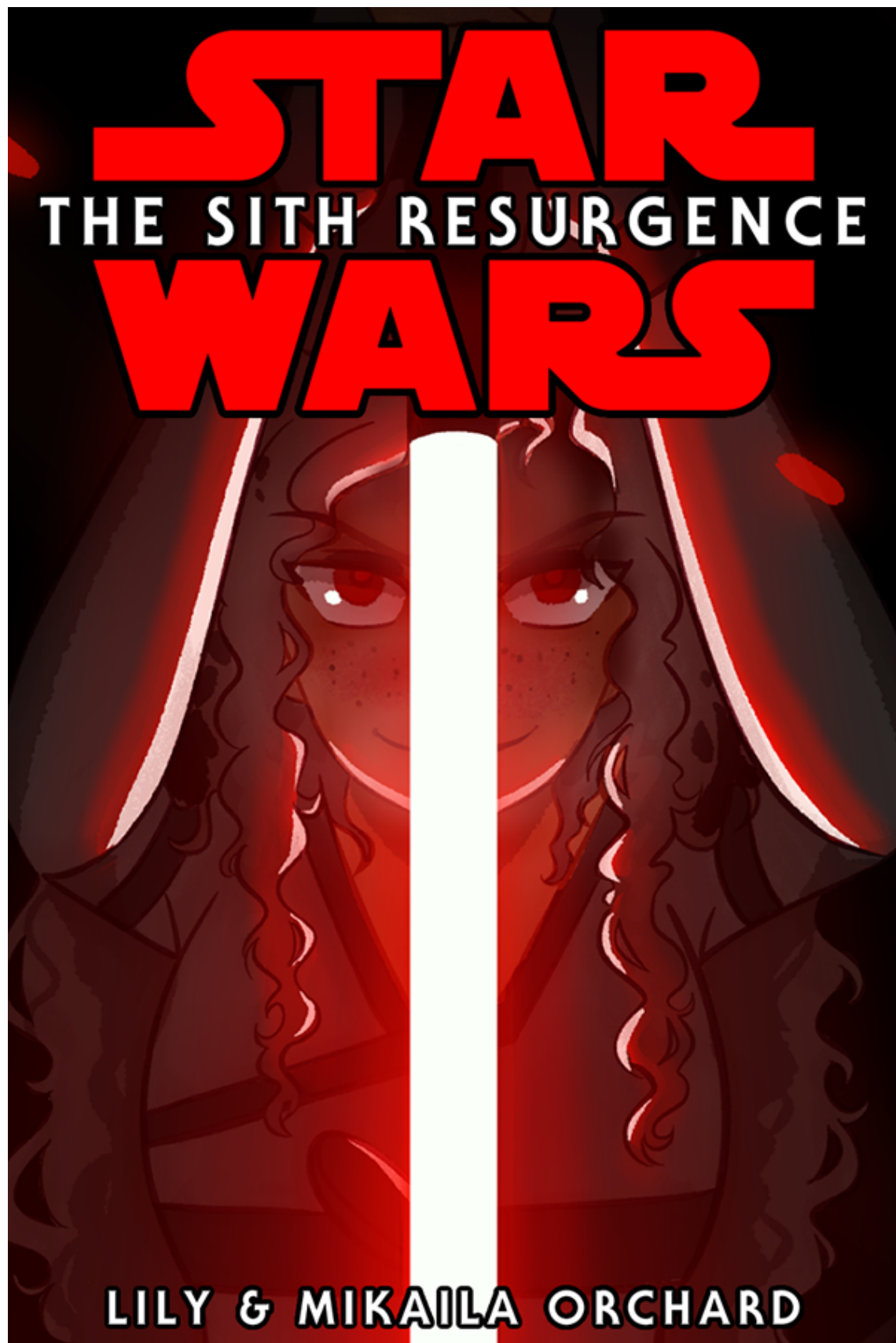
A young Sith Lord living in exile lands on Jakku looking for a hyperdrive coil for her ship, which sparks a cascade in the Force that will destroy old regimes, defy the will of the Force, and reshape the galaxy forever.

A Sequel Trilogy Rewrite with the pandering fan service removed and replaced with women loving each other and the status quo being given a thorough beating.

Mercenary, Bounty Hunting, Deliveries, Wetwork

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



Aliana let out a strained groan as she trudged through the sands of Jakku. She hated desert planets. They were hot, devoid of life, and only inhabited by the Hutts looking to capitalize off the waste

left by the Republic. Jakku was no different. In fact it was more infested with Hutts than ever after the Galactic Civil War ended and Star Destroyers were left all over the planet. Unfortunately for Aliana, Jakku was also the closest place to Odessen with a scrap dealer, which she was finding herself in increasing need of as her ship continued to age. She glanced back at the dwindling silhouette of the Fury, an old Sith Empire ship that she'd grown too fond of to throw away for her own good. That ship was going to be the end of her one of these days, and the sand in her shoes scratching up her legs told her that today just might be the day.

She turned her attention back to Niima Outpost and continued trudging her way through the sand, once again cursing her attachment to the Fury. The ship was simply too recognizable to be landed closer to the outpost. The Empire and the First Order hadn't bothered to change their aesthetic design, and the Fury looked too much like an enlarged TIE ship to be expected NOT to draw attention. And as such she was forced to walk the large distance through the dunes and sand of Jakku.

"You know what?" she said to herself as she kicked her foot into the dune, kicking up a cloud of sand, "I really hate this stuff."

It was an hour before Aliana made it to Niima Outpost and the first thing she did was find herself something to refill her water tankard with. There was no shortage of people willing to trade water, but they always wanted something of value instead of typical Hutt currency. Currency was flimsy out here in the backwater worlds, especially when there was little to buy with it. Even Niima's own goons traded in ration packs; sealed packages of polystarch and veg-meat that provided a lot of nutrition at relatively low cost. They were made for soliders, but for the hungry and desperate scavengers of Jakku they were worth more than electrum.

Hence why money was of little use out here. And the only thing of value Aliana had was clipped to her belt and far too dangerous in the hands of anyone not equipped to handle it. No, trading her lightsaber was out of the question. If her mother could have seen her even entertain the idea, she'd have never heard the end of it. Aliana had supplies on the ship, and tradeable goods. In a pinch she could always barter with what she had on the ship and return to fetch it. But for now she needed to find someone willing to trade.

She did manage to fill her water tankard by stealing ration packs from the Concession Area and trading them to a moisture farmer. It was crude, but it would make the trek back to the Fury all the easier. And besides, the Hutts had plenty of money and resources. They could handle a few skimmed ration packs.

'Or a lot of skimmed ration packs,' Aliana thought as she briefly considered swiping the lot and handing them out like candy. It would certainly help the funny looks at least.

With a heavy sigh, she made her way to the scrap dealer. Not a lot sold on Niima Outpost, it was mostly a place for scavengers to turn in their finds. But enough of them had speeders that it became worthwhile to keep some stock for sale. This, of course, only attracted smugglers, hermits, and Aliana herself to the planet to get universal ship parts for cheap.

She approached a miserable looking human sat at the scrap table, "Morning Traig," she said cheerfully. Traig was a lovely soul. A helpful dealer who always managed to help Aliana find exactly what she needed. Well, with a little persuading at the very least.

Traig looked up, and his face wrinkled in disgust when he saw her, "What do you want, Sith?"

Aliana rolled her eyes and sat down, “I need a Hyperdrive coil. The Fury’s is on its last legs and if I can’t get a new one, I’m not going to be doing many more jumps now am I?”

Traig snorted and looked back down at this scrap, trying to scrub the dirt off a capacitor. “One stranded Sith? Sounds like the Galaxy is already a better place.” He looked back down at his junk pile and continued sorting through it.

“Well, that’s where things get bad for you Traig,” Aliana smirked, “Because a stranded Sith hanging around your outpost is pretty bad for business. I mean, with all this sensitive equipment it would just be terrible if there was...” she extended a finger and a jolt of Force Lightning zapped a few small components, causing them to spark and explode. “...An accident.”

Traig growled at her, but didn’t retaliate. He’d learned the hard way not to cross Aliana when she needed something, “Look, even if I wanted to help you, I don’t have a Hyperdrive coil. You’re just going to have to look around and see if a scavenger is feeling generous.”

Aliana looked around the outpost. Grungy, dirty, and the perfect picture to go alongside the word ‘rust heap.’ The scavengers of Niima Outpost didn’t fare very well. The Hutts kept them busy tearing apart the crashed ships for scraps of rations, and those that didn’t die in the desert always looked like they were close to keeling over from sheer exhaustion and hunger. This did mean that scavengers could be easily bought. More so than the Hutts. A good full meal and a few free ration packs and most of the scavengers would gladly part with anything. On more than one occasion Aliana had managed to get ahold of expensive parts for her ship simply by giving a scavenger enough food to last them a few weeks.

A few years ago in fact, when she was just a teenager, Aliana had come to Jakku with her mother and had spent most of the day with a very young and very distraught looking scavenger who seemed to struggle to pull parts off a downed speeder. It was probably one of the only times during those days that Aliana had risked drawing her lightsaber on a planet as she sliced parts off the speeder and handed them to the girl. She’d even left her a small plasma torch to cut parts off herself when it was time to leave. It was a nice time.

That girl had apparently died from starvation after too many unproductive days.

Sighing, Aliana stood up and made her way to the concession area hoping to find someone willing to trade a Hyperdrive coil. Or who even had one.

Two hours into her search and already she was in luck. Aliana was certain that she’d be on Jakku shaking down scavengers for the better part of a week. A young human girl was standing in the lineup to turn in her scrap and on the tray she was dragging was a Hyperdrive coil. The Sith eyed the girl curiously as she kept looking around the Concession Area as if trying to keep tabs on every single person walking around. It was odd behavior, Aliana thought. It seemed as though scavengers on Jakku kept their hands to themselves and didn’t try to steal each other’s scraps.

Aliana had to admit that, for a scavenger who was covered in dirt, sweat and grime, she was *exceptionally* pretty. Her hair was tied back in tight buns and her tunic was tied in a very flattering fashion around her. Aliana's eyes trailed down to her arms, noticing how firm and toned they were. Hauling parts all day every day would certainly make someone quiet strong. Aliana was almost sure that the girl could lift her easily if she tried.

She didn't approach. She usually didn't approach scavengers until after they were offered a meager price by Unkar Plutt so she could swoop in with a much better offer. She counted herself lucky that the scavengers dealt in ration packs, because she was always stocked to the teeth with them. They were quick, cheap, and came in handy if you were stranded on a planet waiting to fix your ship. She'd learned the hard way to always keep a large stock on the Fury. It was almost laughable that the Hutts shortchanged the scavengers so heavily because ration packs cost less than a credit to make. Aliana could spend a few hundred credits and simply destroy the Hutt's entire operation if she wanted to.

Jakku was a scam of the highest calibre. The Hutts rake in money from salvaged parts and the scavengers were forced to beg for less than crumbs. Were she in a better position to do something about it, she'd have had Plutt's head mounted on the front of the Fury by now.

The girl had finally approached the counter, and hefted the hyperdrive coil up for Plutt to see. Plutt looked it over, then frowned before offering the girl a half-portion of a ration pack for the coil and everything else on her cart.

Now was her chance.

"Excuse me?" she called out to the girl, who turned to her with a startled look on her face, "I'll offer you a better deal for your Hyperdrive coil."

"And what sort of deal is that?" the girl asked, looking at her suspiciously. Aliana couldn't deny that the girl was strikingly beautiful. Soft features, striking brown eyes, hair that looked much too soft for the climate she lived in despite it being mostly tied back. In the brief moment Aliana took to gander, a cheesy line regarding "Desert jewels" entered her mind. She internally slapped herself for being distracted and refocused her attention.

"I'll feed you a proper meal, and give you fourteen double-ration packs," Aliana smiled, "All I ask in return is the coil, for you to come to my ship and install it, and your name."

The girl's eyes went wide, "That's an entire month's worth of food."

"I *really* need that coil," Aliana smiled. "And I'm not so good with the machines."

"Deal!" the girl said excitedly, holding out her hand, "My name is Rey."

"You got a last name, Rey?" Aliana asked, taking her hand and shaking it.

Something in Rey's eyes went dark at the question, and Aliana realized she must have touched a nerve, "...I don't know what it is."

"Fair enough," Aliana nodded, desperately looking to regain a favourable footing in the conversation, "I'm Aliana Beniko. My ship is parked a mile out from the outpost."

"I have a speeder," Rey nodded, slinging her pack and staff over her back.

"Oh, you are my hero," Aliana laughed as she followed Rey to the outer edge of the outpost, "I was not looking forward to another walk through the desert."

"Why didn't you just park your ship on the landing pads with the others?" Rey asked, looking back at Aliana with confusion. She couldn't comprehend why someone would trudge an hour through

the sand. Someone wearing as much black as Aliana was no less.

“My ship’s design is too similar to First Order vessels,” Aliana explained as they reached the speeder, “Last thing I need is a bunch of panicked scavengers hurling junk at me.”

“Are you from the Confederacy?” Rey asked.

“I’m independent.”

“Jedi?”

“Why would you think that?” Aliana asked.

Rey only tilted her head toward Aliana’s waist where her lightsaber was hanging. Aliana, with the speed of a thousand rehearsals, replied “No, that doesn’t work. It’s just a good bluff.” She wasn’t entirely certain why she was lying. She never lied about the fact that she was Sith before. But something deep within her compelled her to conceal the truth this time.

“Smart,” Rey smiled as the two mounted the speeder and took off toward the desert.

Rey almost couldn’t believe her luck. The coil was quite a valuable find, and she had been incensed that Plutt would offer so little for such a valuable piece. She was about to curse him out for his greed when this offworlder had swooped in with a better deal. Almost as if she was watching her and waiting.

She had been. Even if Rey hadn’t seen her, she could practically feel the woman’s eyes boring through her. And strangely enough, she was convinced that the stranger had been checking her out. She didn’t know why she thought that. She just had a feeling about it.

Whatever, Rey thought. For a month of food this offworlder could stare at her as much as she wanted.

Admittedly she’d been nervous when she finally saw the Fury. Aliana hadn’t been lying when she said it resembled First Order ships too much. In fact, to the untrained eye the two would be one and the same. But Rey had dismantled Imperial ships and First Order ships before, and this particular design was in neither of their registries. But she now fully understood Aliana’s worry about landing too close to Niima Outpost. She would be inviting hostility and possibly violence by doing so.

Rey had expected the ship to come from some time before the Clone Wars, but after examining the Hyperdrive and cringing at the sheer age of many of its parts it was clear it was considerably older than that. Based on the fuel converters alone she concluded that the Fury was three thousand years old. It was in terrible condition for a modern ship, but for a ship so old it was practically pristine. Unfortunately it was also poorly maintained. Aliana either wasn’t the kind of person to maintain her ship, or didn’t know how. Considering how she mentioned that machines eluded her, the latter was probably the most likely.

“Where exactly did you get this ship anyway?” Rey asked as she slid under the Hyperdrive generator.

“It’s an old family heirloom,” Aliana said, sitting down on a crate and watching Rey work.

“Must be nice,” Rey said, somewhat bitterly.

“Family not the bequeathing type?” Aliana asked, tilting her head.

“I don’t know,” Rey said, her voice hitching slightly, “I’ll have to ask them when they come back.”

“When might that be?”

“I don’t know.”

“Never knew them?”

“How’d you guess?”

“The lack of a last name tipped me off,” Aliana said, getting off the crate and sitting down beside her as she worked, “So how’d you end up on Jakku?”

“If it’s all the same to you, I’d rather not recite my life story to a stranger,” Rey huffed as she kicked a hydrosponder toward herself, “I’d rather just do the job you’re paying me to.”

Rey could hear Aliana fall quiet, and then get up and leave. She was glad to have some quiet, but she could feel... something. Like a wave of disappointment had washed over her. She slid out from under the hyperdrive just in time to see Aliana round the corner, looking at the floor.

“What an odd woman,” she muttered, sliding back under the Hyperdrive.



All in all, this was a productive day for Aliana. Her ship was fixed in record time and the Hyperdrive was purring like a kitten. This Rey had quite a knack for ships and Aliana had barely finished cooking when she came in saying she was finished. The girl had even fine-tuned the hyperdrive and cleaned out most of it's parts for good measure, and Aliana was convinced that she'd just been given a rare blessing by the Force.

As she set a plate down in front of her, Aliana took in the scavenger's appearance. She was smeared with engine grease and her hair had come free from its knots in places. Aliana had never found the "mechanic" look particularly attractive before, but she was finding herself unable to take her eyes off Rey.

Aliana blinked, having caught herself becoming distracted by the pretty girl yet again. "I'll have your ration packs ready after you've eaten," she said, sitting down in front of her.

"Thank you," Rey nodded, taking a bite before freezing in place, "Wow... this is delicious! You made this?"

Before Aliana could respond, a robotic voice chimed in. "Darth Amorosa is quite an experienced chef indeed!"

Aliana whirled around to see her least favorite stowaway. 2V-R8, a protocol droid that came with the ship and was likely just as old. She kept the droid around because without him she wouldn't

have been able to run the ship. And after ten years with nobody else around, 2V had become the closest thing to family she had. For all his irritations, she loved the droid.

Alas, she should have known it would have jumped at the chance to praise her, whenever the opportunity arose.

Rey almost choked on her next mouthful at the droid's words, "I'm sorry, Darth Amorosa?"

Thinking quickly, Aliana put on an annoyed face and looked at the droid, "Damn thing's got a faulty memory core. Keeps getting me mixed up with one of its previous masters."

"Previous master?" Rey asked, looking suspicious.

"The droid is old," Aliana lied, "About as old as the ship. They weren't always family heirlooms, and I guess they used to belong to a Sith named Amorosa at some point, and that was when the droid's memory core started to experience issues. That's my best guess, and sadly I can never find compatible parts for him." It wasn't completely a lie. The ship was old, as was 2V-R8, but Aliana's family had managed to keep him in reasonably good condition. She was hoping that it was convincing enough to keep Rey from pressing for more details.

"Oh my, have I offended Master?" 2V-R8 asked, "I'm ever so sorry!"

"My name is Aliana!" Aliana hissed, "Now get out of here!"

2V-R8 left without another word, and Rey shrugged and continued eating. She was no stranger to faulty droids, and older droids had a hard time with names and identities so she thought nothing else of it. If the droid was as old as the ship, they both likely had a long history of previous owners.

Internally, Aliana let out a massive sigh of relief. While she wasn't particularly choosy about who she let in on the knowledge of who she was, in fact she pridefully announced herself as the Dark Lady of the Sith at times, she was still cautious with first impressions. She was quite frankly lucky that Traig had not seen fit to out her to the rest of the outpost. It only ever caused problems for her and alienated people she needed to stay on good terms with. She'd once made the mistake of answering a hail with her Sith name and had been chased across half the galaxy by a Resistance frigate for a month straight. She shuddered at the memory. It was the closest she'd come to being blasted into space, and she was still nervous around Resistance ships to this day.

Nevertheless, her caution only extended so far. If she was going to be killed for being Sith, then she'd face such a death without fear. But... there was something about this girl.

Initially, Aliana had planned to smooth-talk Rey into bed with her for the night, and send her off in the morning. She'd done it so many times it was practically second nature. But the more they spoke, the more uneasy she felt about it. It was as if... now that she'd gotten to know her, she didn't want to just sleep with her and throw her out the door. That was part of the reason she concealed her identity. The more they talked, the more she... *liked* this girl.

"So what do you do?" Rey asked, looking up from her plate.

Aliana jolted as she was pulled from her thoughts and momentarily blanked, "Uh... I do a little bit of everything, really. Mercenary, bounty hunting, deliveries, wetwork, anything I can do to get by, really."

Rey choked again, dropping her plate onto the seat beside her and pounded her fist against her chest, "Wetwork?!"

"All my targets are First Order," Aliana assured her, "Republic SIS has a lot of people out there picking off stormtroopers and officers. They actually have a bounty out on Kylo Ren, but not a lot of people try to take that job."

"Why not?" Rey asked, sitting forward. She was always interested in news from the galaxy, especially regarding the latest galactic war.

"Ren's a Dark Jedi," Aliana explained, "With the Force and a working lightsaber, you're a dangerous target. Back during the Clone Wars, the Jedi became famous for being one-man armies that left trails of bodies in their wake."

"I thought the Jedi were the guardians of peace?" Rey asked, looking puzzled, "Why are they leaving bodies?"

"How do you think you guard peace?" Aliana asked, "A lightsaber isn't meant to be a flashlight."

Rey thought about Aliana's question for a moment, then nodded. She wanted to argue, but couldn't really think of how one was supposed to be a Guardian of Peace during war time other than to win said war.

"So... have you met any Jedi? In your travels?" Rey asked.

Aliana had to resist the urge to bristle at the question. Brushing a strand of thick wavy brown hair out of her face, she put on a face of indifference.

"Can't say I have," she replied. "They were all wiped out after the First Order started to rise up."

Rey narrowed her eyes slightly. For whatever reason she didn't feel satisfied with Aliana's answer. Or rather, unconvinced. "It's just..." she started. "You seem to know a lot about them."

"I'm well read," Aliana said plainly.

"How much?"

It was Aliana's turn to narrow her eyes at Rey. "You press me on this right after saying you'd rather not 'Recite your life story to a total stranger'?"

Rey felt her next words die in her mouth as she looked down on the plate she said aside. "...Fair enough." She said.

Aliana felt a slight twinge of guilt at Rey's rather deflated expression. "... Did you... want seconds? Y'know, before you go?"

Rey's face lit right back up. "Oh! Yes please, I mean... so long as you're offering. I wouldn't want to impose."

Aliana smiled. "No imposition at all, I'll be right back," she said, making her way back to the kitchen.

When she returned, the two continued to talk as they ate. Topics ranged from the First Order to ways to upgrade the Fury to be a more reliable, modern ship. As they spoke, Aliana found herself quite liking Rey. It was rare she got to converse with someone on such a personal level, where it almost seemed like they were friends. Usually it was potential employers and security she mostly spoke to. Maz Kanata maybe, but that old pirate seemed more like an elder than anything else.

Rey was like Aliana's polar opposite in every possible way. A gearhead, where Aliana was a scholar. A scavenger, where Aliana was a freelancer. About the only thing they had in common was the fact that Aliana could sense that the Force was strong with Rey. Sadly she couldn't broach that topic without revealing herself.

When Rey finally packed up her things to leave, Aliana handed her a container filled with double-ration packs. She didn't tell her, but Aliana had actually put thirty packs into the container rather than the fourteen they had agreed upon. They shook hands and Aliana stood on the ramp of the Fury as she watched Rey speed off back into the desert. Aliana remained on the ramp long after Rey had gotten out of sight, mulling over the day. It had been nice to have Rey around for the last few hours, and she quietly hoped that if she ever came back to Jakku that she would see her again. Rey had been helpful, talkative, friendly, and Aliana was embarrassed to admit that she couldn't take her eyes off her. She was almost certain that Rey would have caught her blushing if the room was light enough to show.

Sighing, she turned to go back inside and prep the ship for launch when a sudden wave of terror, hatred and death washed over her. She was so overwhelmed by it that she fell to her knees on the ramp. Then, as quickly as it had come, it vanished.

Aliana recognized it instantly. She'd felt the murder of a lot of people coming from the direction of Tuanul, the village that worshipped the Force and were always trying to rebuild the Jedi. Aliana had always tried to stay clear of the village. She never would have assumed she would be welcome around people who allied themselves with the Jedi, much as she was always curious about the village's people.

Getting to her feet, Aliana hurried inside and prepped the Fury for launch. Jedi Cult or no, she wasn't about to just ignore what she'd felt.

Aliana stepped off the Fury and was struck cold by what she saw. The village was in ruins. Bodies were scattered everywhere. An X-Wing Fighter was burning on the outskirts of the village. None of the corpses seemed to have any weapons or appear to be militant or hired thugs. As such she could only conclude that the village had no real defenses with which to fight back. It was a proper one-sided massacre. But worst of all, she could feel the Dark Side of the Force lingering in the air. It was faint, whoever had done this was clearly inexperienced, but she knew this was done by a Force User.

Taking a deep breath and preparing herself for the worst, the Sith drew her lightsaber and cut through the fallen barricades of the village. There had to be someone still alive. Her lightsaber remained active as she scoured the village for any signs of life or even a clue as to what had happened. The sand shimmered a bright red in the glow of her lightsaber as her eyes darted to every inch they could see. Almost everyone was dead, but she could sense a brief life still flickering.

Through her persistence, she finally found it. An old man curled up in the sand. She hurried over to him and held her lightsaber aloft so she could see his face.

“What happened here?” she asked, examining his wounds. A large smoldering gash could be seen right across his chest. There was no mistaking it. He’d been cut deep by a lightsaber. There was nothing she could do for him. A cut this deep and wide was fatal.

The old man coughed and looked up at her, “The First Order...”

Aliana huffed. She should have known, “What did they want?”

“...Skywalker,” the old man heaved, “They took... Resistance pilot...”

Aliana quickly tried to piece together everything the man was saying. The First Order was looking for a Skywalker. That had to have been Luke Skywalker, the old Jedi Master. And they took a resistance pilot? What for? The Resistance had no idea where Skywalker was, nobody did.

Then it dawned on her. The old man did. He told the pilot.

She felt a hand on her face and looked back down to see the old man touching her cheek, “You’re... not a Jedi...”

Aliana shook her head, “I’m a Sith Lord.”

“Will... you help?”

Aliana stared down at him, her heart racing. She tried to stay out of the war between the Republic and the First Order beyond a few odd jobs. She wasn’t a desired ally for the Republic, and she’d decapitate herself before she considered joining the First Order. She had always tried to help wherever she could, but operating from the shadows and usually in nothing big. Getting involved and helping in a way that the old man was asking would mean stepping into the sunlight.

And sunlight was dangerous.

Knowing she was probably going to get herself killed, she nodded, “Yes, I will.”

The old man seemed to relax, and his hand slipped from her cheek, “Thank you... Sith...”

His head lolled back and his breathing became raspy and shallow. Knowing how much pain he was in, Aliana brought her lightsaber to his neck and quickly severed his head. She looked away from his body and started back towards her ship. She’d just promised to help, but now what was she supposed to do?

As she was about to head up the ramp to the Fury, she spotted something out of the corner of her eye. A small divot in the sand that stretched out into the horizon. Something had been rolling out into the desert. Something that had been here not too long ago. It was headed vaguely in the direction of Niima Outpost. With any luck it would be there by tomorrow afternoon. With a new resolve, she got back into the Fury and prepared to return to the outpost. It looked like her stay on Jakku was going to be a little longer.

For new readers looking at the word count and wondering: Rey and Aliana get together in Chapter 14.

Cover Art by ZeroZeroRen

Swing Your Lightsaber Like It's A Club

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Kylo Ren was deeply disturbed. More so than usual, the rest of the crew had noticed. The Finalizer had been extremely quiet ever since he'd returned, which was a pleasant change from the Dark Jedi's usual screaming and lightsaber damage every other week. Stormtrooper deaths had dropped eighty percent in the last day alone and General Hux seemed to be a lot less tense than usual. Ren on the other hand was anything but pleased. He'd felt a surge in the Dark Side after Tuanul was destroyed. He'd thought it was from the brutality he'd enforced on the villagers, but it had come from somewhere distant on Jakku. He hadn't been able to pinpoint it before it was gone, but he'd felt enough to know that someone strong in the Dark Side of the Force was on the planet. How strong? He couldn't yet tell. But strong enough to warrant investigation.

"My Lord?" came the voice of a Stormtrooper.

"Yes?" Ren asked, turning his head only slightly to acknowledge him.

"The scouts have come back from their survey, and they found an ancient Fury-Class Imperial Interceptor sitting in a dune an hour from Niima Outpost," the Trooper explained, "The initial report suggests-"

"Did you say... Fury-Class?" Ren asked, slowly standing up.

"Uh... yes."

"And what did the initial report suggest?"

"They saw a young woman leave and return to the ship several times over the night," the Trooper explained, growing increasingly nervous, "And... a lightsaber was on her belt."

"Is this woman a Jedi?" Ren asked. He knew that was impossible. There were no Jedi left. He'd personally seen to that. Nevertheless, the Jedi were historically resilient, always coming back from one purge after another just as powerful as ever.

"No, Commander," the Trooper shook his head. "We ran scans of her through the recognition database. And the results were... inconclusive."

"...Yes?" Ren gestured for him to continue.

"She's... a Sith Lord. There have been rumors and sightings regarding the Sith all across the Galaxy for the last few years," the trooper explained, bracing himself and waiting for a Lightsaber to strike him.

Ren seemed to lose his composure as he turned and looked out toward Jakku. The surge in the Dark Side he'd felt before. There was no mistaking it now. There was a Sith Lord on Jakku.

"Shall I... organize an attack force, Commander?" the Trooper asked.

“No,” Ren shook his head, “Continue your search for the droid. I will visit this Sith personally. She is a potential ally.” In his head he added ‘*Or a dangerous enemy.*’



Aliana was exhausted. Her clothes were filled with sand, which she was coming to find a truly horrible substance, and her search throughout the night had yielded no results. It seemed whatever had sped off into the desert was truly lost unless a scavenger found it. Aliana didn't even know what she was looking for, just that the trail had gone cold after a desert wind had kicked the dune up around it. And without knowing what she was looking for, she couldn't have 2V scan for it. It was early morning when she made it back to her ship, kicking herself for continuing to dawdle on getting a speeder. She continued trudging through the sand, the thought of a future wash and a nap being the driving power to keep her walking, when she saw a shuttle land just a few meters from her ship.

A First Order shuttle.

And its occupant was blocking the ramp. A tall, hooded figure in a vented helmet. Aliana recognized him as Kylo Ren, the Dark Jedi who commanded the First Order. The stubborn aftertaste of the late Galactic Empire. This wasn't good. Being on the First Order's radar was

exactly what she wanted to avoid, and now one of its highest officers was standing outside her ship. Aliana approached with her guard up, and her hand hovering just over her lightsaber.

"Hello, Sith," Ren said, in what was probably supposed to be a friendly voice. It was difficult to tell from the garbling of his helmet's voice filter.

Aliana glared back, not interested in even pretending to be friendly, "What do you want, Jedi?"

"I am no Jedi," Ren said, his voice cracking ever so slightly.

"You aren't Sith either," Aliana spat, her hand resting on her lightsaber, "And you aren't welcome here."

"There is no need for hostility, despite how naturally it comes to your kind," Ren said, bowing his head slightly as if that would abate the sneering tone in his voice. "I only want to talk."

"Then talk." Aliana kept her hand on her lightsaber.

"Well first, I must know... how are the Sith still alive? I thought after all this time they would be truly extinct."

"That's what most of the galaxy thought for about a thousand years. Sith never go truly extinct," Aliana said, relaxing slightly, "I'm the last one."

"Who trained you?" Kylo pressed. "Was it Palpatine? Vader?"

"...My mother," Aliana said sadly, looking away from him, "Darth Mayrik."

"I'm not familiar with that name," Ren tilted his head, eyeing the Sith and watching her movements carefully.

"You wouldn't be," Aliana glared back up at him, "My family did a good job hiding from Bane's Sith and the Empire. And from you."

"But why hide from your brethren?" Ren asked. He was fishing for information, but the question was sincere. The fact that there was a Sith Lord actively avoiding the First Order was... troubling.

"The First Order aren't my brethren," Aliana scoffed, a scowl crossing her face as she looked at Kylo Ren with utmost disdain. "They idolize an empire built on deception and treachery. I gain nothing from collaborating with you. I'm the Dark Lady of the Sith, not a Jedi wearing some dead man's old clothes. Your master is nothing compared to me."

"The Supreme Leader is wise," Kylo Ren spat, growing increasingly bitter. "He will hunt you down and destroy you for your insolence."

"What a lovely way to say you intend to lose today," Aliana sneered. With that, she activated her lightsaber. The crimson blade glowed faintly in the growing daylight, and she spun it behind her back as she paced a circle around Ren.

Kylo Ren was fuming at being threatened by this... relic of a bygone era as his master Snoke would put it. Despite his own desire for a peaceful exchange of information, his ego got the better of him as he activated his lightsaber and charged.

Aliana smirked and blocked his wide swing, keeping the blades locked as she ducked under his arm and slashed down his leg. Ren growled in pain, turning and swinging wildly. Aliana parried the attack and kicked Ren off balance before taking a quick slash at his mask, carving a gouge into it and exposing one of his eyes.

She was quite amused. Kylo Ren's form was slow, heavy, and extremely open to counterattack. His movements suggested he was wielding an 80 pound vibroblade, rather than a plasma weapon. The knight's slow predictable movements reminded her of the training droid her mother had her practice on as a child. The momentary whiff of nostalgia adding to the general entertainment of her opponent's utter worthlessness.

"You swing your lightsaber like it's a club," Aliana snickered, "What kind of Jedi are you?"

Ren reached up and touched the slice in his mask. He was fuming as he staggered to his feet, swinging his lightsaber down toward Aliana's head. Again, his strike was blocked and he felt a foot hit his chest and send him back into the sand. Before he could pull himself back up, Aliana's blade was at his throat.

"You have two choices," Aliana glared down at him, "Leave, or die."

Ren laid all but helplessly in the sand, unsure how this confrontation swung so swiftly in favor of the Sith. For all of his training, all of the darkness within him, he still laid there, bested by this stranger. "I'll leave," he said, glaring at Aliana with hatred in his one visible eye.

Aliana deactivated her lightsaber and jerked her head toward his shuttle, "Well go then. And don't trouble me again or I'll have your head."

Ren got up and slowly walked to his shuttle. The sheer humiliation of his defeat only making him want to lash out at the insolent Sith even more. He restrained himself, as even in his furious state he could tell he was outmatched. He internalized this hatred, allowed it to fill him up, as Snoke had taught him. Now he had a goal to reach. An opponent to overcome on his path to power.

'This Sith must be strong,' he thought.

"That Jedi was pathetic," Aliana said as she watched the shuttle take off, looking confused, "That's who leads the Knights of Ren? He fights like he's never held a lightsaber before."

Aliana had considered killing him, but it would have been unwise. Killing Ren would have brought the entire First Order on her tail. It likely would have been brought onto her tail anyway, but at least striking a bargain had a chance to let her leave without being pursued to Odessen. Still, she couldn't shake that Jedi's clumsy lightsaber skills from her mind. He had to have at least been trained by someone, why did he handle his weapon with such needless weight?

Aliana shook her head in confusion as she headed back into the Fury. Withdrawing the ramp and sealing the door, she collapsed onto the bed in her quarters and stared up at the ceiling. How exactly did such a weak Jedi become commander of an entire military force? Why did his lightsaber have exhaust vents? Why was she still wearing her Sith robes even though they were infested with sand?

She jumped out of bed and wrenched her tunic over her head, letting out a sigh of relief as she felt the entire desert of Jakku fall to her feet and off her skin.

“Once I find what vanished into the desert, I am never coming back here,” she groaned, kicking her boots off and making a beeline for the shower, the annoying distraction that was the Dark Jedi far from her mind.

Aliana stepped out of the shower, a loose and comfortable robe wrapped around herself. She yelped as her feet touched the cold metal of the ship, and made a mental note to put down some carpets in the main living areas. She collapsed into a heap on one of the couches and sighed happily. She felt clean, relaxed, and had a moment of respite before she was forced to go out into the desert again and ruin her entire life.

“Cloak next time,” she muttered to herself, “Less sand getting into the folds of my robes.”

2V-R8 took that moment to waddle into the lounge of the ship from the engine room. “Master, I don’t wish to intrude on your relaxation time, but I couldn’t help but hear a commotion outside as I was checking the hyperdrive, which is operating at peak efficiency by the way. Might I inquire what transpired and if we are in any danger?”

“The First Order was outside,” Aliana muttered, sitting up and brushing her wet hair out of her eyes, “And yes, we are in danger. But we can’t get out of it until we find a droid that Jedi was looking for.”

“Oh dear,” 2V said solemnly. “Perhaps this time I am finally on the cusp of my inevitable destruction. Er.. if I may be so bold to ask, Master, why are we involving ourselves with the affairs of Jedi? I mean, after what befell Master Mayrik, I was under the belief you wouldn’t want to go anywhere near them again.”

Aliana looked up at 2V, her lips pursed as she thought about why she was doing this. She wasn’t being held to the promise she made to a dying man. She was keeping to it of her own volition. Of course, this wasn’t no ordinary Jedi situation.

“The Jedi believes himself to be my kin,” she explained. “And I won’t take such a personal insult lying down.”

“Oh! But of course, Master.” 2V replied, bowing slightly. “The First Order and the Galactic Empire before it are but shallow reflections of the proud lineage of your Sith heritage. And such a cheap imitation cannot go unabated after all.”

“Thank you, 2V. That will be enough brown nosing for today,” Aliana said, waving the droid off.

“Of course, Master!” 2V said before waddling away.

Aliana stepped into the cockpit to look outside. The sun was barely rising, and she’d been out all night searching for the droid. Now that she knew what she was looking for, it might be easier to locate it, but for now she desperately needed some sleep. “Proud lineage,” she scoffed. “I’m a drifter who works as a merc to get by.”

She trudged her way to her quarters and sealed the door shut, collapsing onto the bed in a heap. Her fatigue seemed to magnify tenfold as she slipped under the covers and she soon drifted off into a peaceful slumber.

Rey's eyes snapped open as she suddenly jerked upright in her hammock. She was unsure as to what it was that actually woke her. Not a nightmare, that was for certain. At least none she could immediately remember. No, this was more of... a bad feeling. She could faintly recall the awful sound of scraping plasma and the smell of burnt steel.

Pulling herself out of her hammock, she rubbed her head and tried to process what she was feeling, and felt something sink into the pit of her stomach as her gut told her it came from the direction of the Fury, where she'd met that girl. Was she okay? Was she in danger? There was a cold, sinking feeling in her stomach at the thought of anything happening to her, which she tried desperately to push down as she gathered her things. There were plenty of components to salvage, and she wasn't about to waste it worrying about someone she barely knew.

Gathering her staff, her net and her facial protection, Rey made her way to the speeder. Climbing into the seat she steeled herself and devoted her entire focus on going to work. She was accustomed to shifting her concentration to scavenging in order to discard whatever complicated feelings she was having. It did her no good to dwell on them. Not when she had to survive.

And survive she did. She managed to beat her personal best on valuable components pulled from the wreckage of a Star Destroyer. She knew Plutt would rip her off, but she kept some of the most valuable parts. Her encounter with Aliana the day before had taught her to hold on to certain things, as there may be ways to get better prices for them later. She stashed a high capacity fuel converter and a tiny shard of Kyber into a small compartment in her speeder and hung the rest on the side. She was right. Plutt did undersell her, but thankfully she hadn't given up the converter or the Kyber. She took her quarter portion and left. It was still food, and she'd rather not burn all the ration packs that Aliana had given her unless she really needed them on days when she couldn't get anything of value.

Her mind wandered back to Aliana. The girl gave Rey an even better deal than she promised when she came back to her shelter and realized that she possessed double the agreed upon portions. It all but baffled her as to why she did that. That much food couldn't just be given away on a whim, why would she willingly part with so many supplies? Perhaps there was indeed kindness and generosity left in the galaxy outside of Jakku. It made a part of her wish that she had just asked Aliana for a ride out of there. At least to the nearest spaceport.

But Rey shook her head of that notion. No. She couldn't leave yet. She needed to stay put. As unfortunate as her situation was over the years, she knew it would be worth it when they came back, and she knew they would come back.

They had to.

Rey took her speeder back to the downed AT-AT she called home and set about preparing her meal. Still her thoughts drifted back to Aliana, as much as she tried to push them out. She couldn't help her curiosity. Everything about her was fascinating. Her ship, her attitude, even that broken droid. She eventually found herself sitting outside eating as she watched Jakku's sun drop, occasionally watching ships leave the atmosphere. "I wonder if one of those is the Fury..."

Her gaze was transfixed on the horizon. So much so she hadn't noticed the small spherical object that had been rolling in her general direction. It wasn't until a series of cautious yet inquisitive beeps rang in the air that Rey's attention snapped to the present. The object was a droid. One that rolled along the ground on its lower body.

"Hello?" she said, looking confused, "Can I help you?"

The droid beeped happily and wobbled on the spot. Rey could barely make out its variation of droidspeak due to the sheer speed with which it was beeping.

“Hold on! Slow down!” she said, laying a hand on the droid, “What do you mean lost?”

The droid repeated what he said, albeit more slowly as Rey requested. Still, the way that panic and desperation seemed to seep into his synthetic language made it a bit trickier to follow.

“Alright... your master is somewhere else and... you have to wait for him?” Rey asked.

The droid beeped in affirmation.

“Ah... I see. Well I know what waiting here feels like,” Rey replied, her thoughts drifting elsewhere for a moment before returning her attention to the droid.

“Well here,” she began running a hand over its head. “I doubt he’ll want to see you again with a broken antenna.” With a careful motion, Rey adjusted the antenna to its original upright position. “Better?”

The droid chirped happily in confirmation.

“You know... I may know someone who could help you,” Rey smiled, “If she hasn’t left the planet yet. Why don’t we head to Niima Outpost in the morning. If your master is anywhere it’s going to be there, and if not I have a friend there who could find him.”

The droid processed the information. Ordinarily he would rather they find his master as soon as possible, yet her logic seemed very agreeable. After a moment of processing, he let out a beep of affirmation. Rey smiled and lifted the droid, who identified himself as BB-8, into the AT-AT. Travelling at night on Jakku was unwise. Native species and humanoids roamed at night and didn’t much care for anything that breathed. She had a fair few scars from learning that lesson the hard way. Taking shelter at sundown was the only way to stay safe in this horrible place.

Hopefully someone at the outpost could help them.

Aliana’s day could have been better. The sight of a TIE interceptor speeding toward the ground in a death spiral certainly didn’t help, and the strong Force presence she felt inside it didn’t help either. She ran toward it as it fell, taking note of the distance and expected crash sight being about ten kilometers from the Fury. She reached out with the Force and gripped the fighter, slowing its descent and redirecting it toward a sand dune. With a growl she wrenched it out of its trajectory and toward the dune where it landed with a thud. Before she could relax however, she saw a body get thrown from the cockpit and toward her. Panicking, she reached out and slowed the body down to a crawl, gently laying him in the sand a few hundred yards from her.

Aliana rushed out toward the body, the Force both augmenting her speed and keeping her steps light upon the sand. Before long she swiftly skidded to a halt in front of the collapsed figure. The man laying in the sand before her looked like he went through absolute hell, but her senses told her that he was at least alive. Perhaps the shock of being jettisoned from the cockpit simply knocked him unconscious. All the same, this one wasn’t the Force presence she felt from high in the air. What was more interesting, though, was that he didn’t look like a man who had any business being on a TIE interceptor.

Her's eyes widened in realization. This had to be the resistance pilot. The one who knew the location of Luke Skywalker. She quickly lifted him up by the shoulders and under the knees and ran off toward the Fury. If her assumptions were correct, he needed to be out of plain sight as soon as possible. She got him on board and into the medical bay, ordering 2V-R8 to tend to his wounds and alert her comlink if he woke up. If the pilot was on Jakku, the pilot's droid likely was as well.

Dawning her dark cloak, Aliana rushed out of the Fury and made her way to Niima Outpost once more. If the droid was anywhere for miles, that would be the most likely place for it to turn up. Most droids were programmed to seek out populaces when none were present.

Her goals for the outpost were three fold. One, find the droid and get him back to the pilot. Two, find the Force presence that was with him in the interceptor and determine if it was friend or foe. Three, if at all possible, keep Rey out of all of this. Her general weakness for a pretty face aside, she sensed Rey's innate talent in the Force. She knew the First Order would be on top of this entire planet before long if they knew a powerful Force sensitive was here. The Knights of Ren proved quite inept but they would act on a potential new recruit if they found one.

Little did she know that a kindred spirit was slowly making his way to Niima Outpost with much the same attitude.

Sand.

Sand sand sand sand sand sand sand.

Sand for miles. Sand as far as the eye could see. Sand mountains and valleys. Sand reflecting the light to make you think there was water only to rip it away like the cruel mistress of fate that it is. This was Finn's life now. No First Order. No Poe. Only the sand to toy with him until his inevitable, horrifying death. It seemed that fate intended to punish him for refusing to kill in the name of a tyrannical regime. If the price for being honorable was a gruesome death, no wonder there was so much evil in the galaxy. Part of him was wishing he was back on the Star Destroyer. At least there was water there.

There was also the certainty of death, and the knowledge that he would have been selling his soul to something truly horrid. After everything he saw in Tuanul, he would rather take his chances with death. But that didn't make it any less terrifying.

A few times he could have sworn he saw a TIE Silencer fly overhead, but it never seemed to stay in the air for very long. It just circled around him and then vanished over a dune. It was certainly bigger than a Silencer, but shaped in a rather similar fashion. He was starting to get nervous with the ship flying above him like a bird of prey every hour. "If it's the First Order, just kill me already," he grumbled, watching it take to the sky and fly toward him again.

To his surprise, the ship actually landed down in front of him. Panic started to well up inside him as he quickly realized he had nowhere to go at this point, and he had no energy to fight. Any attempt would likely get him blasted by the ship's weapons. That panic only worsened when a hooded figure came down the loading ramp and toward him, a canteen in their hand.

"Are you alright?" came a woman's voice from beneath the hood.

Finn relaxed slightly, and only felt more confused. If this was the First Order, he'd certainly gotten the most cordial Knight he'd ever met. "What?"

"I said are you alright?" the woman asked, taking her hood and pulling it down.

Finn was confused. The woman looked like a Stormtrooper. Or rather, every Stormtrooper he'd ever seen with their helmet off, minus the mandatory buzz-cut. In fact, she was actually quite pretty. "Uh..."

"Here," she said, reaching out and handing him the canteen, "It's water."

Finn's worries and fears were almost immediately forgotten as he seized the canteen and opened it, taking a long gulp from the cold water inside. It was true what they said. The closer you were to water, the worse your thirst became.

The cloaked stranger's lips quirked in an amused, lopsided grin. "Careful now. Swallow that too fast you might throw it back up."

Finn didn't verbally respond but began taking noticeably smaller gulps.

"You have a name?" the woman asked.

Finn took the canteen away from his mouth and wiped his lips. His Stormtrooper number was immediately called to mind before he remembered the name that Poe had given him on the ship. "Uh... Finn."

"Aliana," Aliana smiled, glancing back at the Fury, "What are you doing all the way out here in the Dunes?"

Finn shrugged, coming up with a lie on the spot, "Speeder crash."

"Uh huh..." Aliana eyed him suspiciously. She could sense that he was lying, but a single unarmed man was no danger to her, "Well, would you like a lift to Niima Outpost? I was just about to head there to meet a friend of mine. Would certainly be better than dying of thirst in the desert."

"I don't suppose you offer transport off world?" Finn asked. There was the tiniest sliver of hope that he could get out of this mess knowing that this woman was friendly.

Aliana shook her head, "Probably not where you're going. But maybe there's someone there who can. Besides, I have unfinished business on Jakku."

"Like what?"

"I'm looking for a droid," Aliana explained, turning back to the ship, "A BB Unit."

Finn scoffed, "Everyone's looking for BB Units."

Aliana turned back around, eyeing him suspiciously, "Are they now?"

Uh oh. Finn had said too much. He swallowed nervously as he tried to come up with another lie, "Uh... I heard a Resistance pilot mention it... a couple of days ago..."

Aliana's eye narrowed harshly, and Finn became even more nervous. This woman was frightening, and had a glare that he honestly swore could pierce through his soul.

“I think you should know, Finn, that lying to me isn’t a wise idea,” Aliana said, her lips curling into a smile, “It may just be the last thing you ever do.”

“I... I’m just careful about... who I share personal information with,” Finn said, feeling an oppressive cloud of fear drape over his mind. All at once he realized that Aliana’s intimidating presence wasn’t entirely natural. Something was screwing with his head, and filling him with terror. He remembered feeling something similar back at the village in Kylo Ren’s presence. It did feel different, however. Better? Worse? It was hard to tell.

Then, as if it were a bad head rush, it lifted. He looked back up at Aliana, who’s sinister smile was replaced with a sweet and friendly one.

“Alright,” she said, turning around and beckoning for him to follow.

Finn walked up the ramp to the ship briskly, feeling it unwise to keep Aliana waiting. As he stepped inside his eyes wandered around the interior design. It was as similar to his old life as the exterior was. The entire ship looked like a run-down First Order corvette. Wait, no... Imperial? “I, uh... don’t suppose-”

“I’m not First Order,” Aliana interrupted. “This ship here is older than them AND the Galactic Empire.

“I-I wasn’t trying to assume anything,” Finn said hastily.

Aliana sighed. “Pardon me. It’s just been a trying day.”

“Tell me about it,” Finn said sympathetically.

“Ah hello there!” came a mechanical voice that made Finn jump out of his skin.

“Ah!” he screamed, quickly turning around to see a droid standing right behind him. “Oh... c’mon, man! What are you doing sneaking up on people like that!?”

“Oh, my apologies,” 2V-R8 responded sincerely. “Scaring you was not my intention. I am pleased to accommodate any guest of Da-”

Aliana fixed 2V with a murderous glare.

“- Any guest of Lady Beniko’s,” 2V quickly corrected himself. “Would you like a beverage? A hot meal? Perhaps one of our fancy guest throw pillows?”

Finn, despite getting over his initial shock, still looked visibly uncomfortable. “... Uh, no. I’m good.”

“Very well, sir. Let me know if you need anything,” with that, 2V turned around and walked back down the hall from whence he came.

“Excuse him,” Aliana said before making her way to the cockpit. “He likes to be helpful.”

“I guess,” Finn said, following Aliana. “So... Niima outpost you said?”

“Indeed,” she confirmed, prepping the ship for launch.

“You sure the locals won’t mind the sight of a... First Order-looking kind of ship?” he asked somewhat nervously.

“Perhaps they will, but I’ve already had more than my fill of walking in this damn desert,” Aliana said, glaring at the sand outside. “Besides, this whole planet might have to deal with actual First Order ships before long.”

“W-Why’s that? Do you know anything?” Finn asked even more noticeably on edge.

Aliana simply looked at him from her seat. “I’m very careful about who I share personal information with,” she replied.

“...Ok fair enough,” Finn accepted, sitting down beside her.

Before long, the Fury was in the air. “Alright. Next stop, Niima Outpost,” Aliana said with a wry smile.

Rey laid back on her hammock as she thought about the woman she’d spent most of the evening with. She’d been giving her funny looks the entire time, always smiling at her and blushing whenever their eyes met. She was kinda... cute. Especially when that dark, freckled face lit up with a smile. That burgundy eyeshadow making her smile pop even more.

She’d quite enjoyed the evening. It was nice being able to talk to someone who didn’t want something from her. Well... she had. The hyperdrive coil. But she didn’t have to cook for her or spend the evening indulging her. Once their business had been concluded, Aliana had welcomed Rey into her home to just... socialize. She’d asked her about herself, indulged in her love of machines, and had been so... easy to talk to. Easy to get along with. It was almost like she’d had a friend.

It was nice, she thought as she rolled over and pulled her thin blanket over herself.

Chapter End Notes

If you enjoyed this chapter, leave a comment explaining why. Free content thrives on interaction and feedback.

Don't Involve A Pretty Lady

Chapter Notes

4/13/21 - This chapter has been updated to better reflect Finn's character.

The flight to the outpost was quick as they didn't have far to travel. Had they wanted, Finn and Aliana could have made it the rest of the way on foot from where she landed last. Of course, both of them have had more than enough of the desert so they opted for the admittedly lazy option. Once Aliana landed the Fury on the edge of the outpost she stood up to go check on the med bay. Finn looked out the window of the cockpit to see the locals becoming visibly unnerved by the sight of the ship. Whatever they came here to do, they had to do it quickly before they caused to big a ruckus.

"Alright, so here's the deal," Aliana said as she pulled her cloak back on and covertly hooked her lightsaber onto her belt, "You help me find my friend and the droid, and I'll take you off world, provided nothing else gets in the way. Deal?"

She extended her hand toward him expectantly. Finn looked at it and briefly pondered his situation. This seemed just a little too good to be true for him, like he was walking right into some trap. To what end this trap wound up, he had no idea. However, as he considered just cutting his losses and seeing if he could find another ship on Jakku, it occurred to him that if Aliana here wanted him dead or to drill him for information, she could have done that plenty of times over by now.

He reached out and accepted her hand. Deal.

Aliana shook his hand, taking notice of the fear that hadn't stopped rolling off of him through the Force. Something had scared Finn to his core. Scared him so badly that she could tell that all he wanted to do was run. She couldn't help but feel a twinge of compassion for him. She knew what it was like to be terrified and on the run, to have nobody to turn to. He was tight-lipped about his situation, but whatever he was going through was something he was going to be dealing with for a long time.

She let go and lowered the Fury's ramp, looking back to 2V as she stepped off the Fury, "2V, keep the medbay sealed and don't get stuck in the floor vent again!"

"Of course, Master Beniko!" 2V said happily as he continued sweeping.

"Janitor droid?" Finn asked as they stepped out into the sunlight.

"Family," Aliana corrected.

Finn was left silent by her answer. Family. That sounds like a nice thing to have. Especially in this day and age. Though the idea that someone would consider a droid to be family wasn't something he'd considered before. In the First Order, droids were tools, and not especially well cared for tools.

“I’d never thought a droid could be family,” he said, looking at her as they arrived in the outpost.

“Your family can be whoever you want it to be,” Aliana said with a shrug, “2V’s a pain in the ass, but he’s my pain in the ass.”

Finn stopped momentarily as Aliana’s words sunk in. Just... making a family like that? The idea was... appealing.

Taking a moment to adjust to the sunlight, Finn set to work searching for this friend of Aliana’s and the droid. His gaze wandered over several different varieties of non human species, some of which he was seeing for the first time today. The First Order was extremely human-centric and didn’t enjoy fraternizing with non-humans. Most Republic languages weren’t taught, and what was taught was only enough to tell someone they were about to die. Even droidspeak was something that occasionally eluded him.

Taking a gamble, he walked up to one of the aliens. “Uh, excuse me. Have you seen a-”

The alien started yelling at him in a language he didn’t understand, but was more than convinced that it meant ‘back off’ to some extent. Finn took a cautious step back, before Aliana stepped between them, snarling at the alien in their own language and making them recoil. She pointed a finger at them, her face contorted in anger as she said something Finn couldn’t understand, but very clearly recognized through tone and posture as a threat.

She turned away from them and returned her gaze to the outpost.

“Keep an eye out, but don’t talk to anyone,” Aliana warned him, “People here are paranoid and desperate. You approach a scavenger too quickly and they’ll think you’re trying to steal their things. If you have to ask someone something, do it from a distance.”

“Don’t talk up close, don’t make any sudden moves. Got it,” Finn said, attempting to take a calming breath. “I’m the best at not talking, y’know. Like how I’m not talking ri-” he paused, realizing he was dangerously close to rambling. He turned around and walked over to examine a tent without another word.

Aliana couldn’t help but smirk. She didn’t need the Force to know that he was nervous. She could also sense that the Force was strong in him, and briefly wondered if he was the presence she felt coming from the TIE Fighter. If it was, and he had a Resistance pilot with him, then they must have stolen it from the cruisers in orbit. Stolen it badly, since it was currently a twisted pile of mangled durasteel in the middle of the desert.

As she turned her gaze elsewhere, she finally saw her. Rey was at Plutt’s counter, staring at a pile of ration packs. Aliana smiled and began to approach when she saw her glance at a droid beside her, and then take only a single pack before departing. Aliana was curious, but thought little of it as she caught up with her.

“Rey,” she called out, waving her head, “Rey! Over here!”

Rey’s attention was pulled from her conversation with BB-8 and to the source of the familiar voice. Her eyes soon fell on Aliana, causing her to grin ear to ear. It was the strange woman from the other day. By some miracle, she hadn’t left yet. “Aliana!” she called back, walking briskly towards the other woman, BB-8 following suit. “It’s good to see you again. I thought you’d be systems away by now.”

“Something came up,” Aliana said, nodding to the droid following her, “That, actually.”

BB-8 gave Aliana a somewhat frightened series of beeps as he rolled behind Rey.

“Oh don’t worry, BB-8,” Rey assured him. “She’s not First Order. I promise.”

Aliana nodded and gave a smile to BB-8, before turning her attention back to Rey, “There was a raid on Tuanul the other night. All the villagers were slaughtered, and one of them was struck with a lightsaber. He was still alive when I found him, but not for long. Mentioned something about the First Order-Resistance war.”

Rey looked back at Aliana, eyes wide with shock. “First Order was here!?” she asked incredulously. “What for? What could they find on Jakku that’s of any value to them?”

BB-8 chittered and beeped once more.

Rey turned her gaze back downwards. “You?”

“I honestly don’t think it’s safe to-”

BB-8 suddenly started beeping loudly, his dome turned somewhere behind Aliana, and his body started to shake violently. Rey and Aliana both followed his gaze to see Finn glancing around tables suspiciously. Rey was confused as to why BB-8 was looking at some drifter until his beeps finally registered. “Him? Your master’s jacket?”

BB-8 let out an affirmative beep and commenced rolling in the man’s direction, Rey not far behind him. Aliana couldn’t help but snicker as she followed after them, careful to make sure that Rey didn’t beat him too badly. There wasn’t much she could do aside from break a nose with a plaststeel staff, but Aliana could sense just how strong she actually was. It’d do Finn no good to have a broken leg on the fly off planet.

Finn watched in confusion as the girl and droid Aliana was talking to began running in his direction. He soon came to the rather frightening realization that they were running at him, and he didn’t much care for the staff she was carrying. Rather taken aback by the determined scowl on the girl’s face, he began running away. He swerved past locals in his path, barely clearing piles of scrap and pottery scattered over the sand in his attempt to escape. He looked behind him to see if they were still there and saw nothing. Breathing a sigh of relief, he turned around too late to stop the butt of a staff hitting him dead in the face and sending him back-first into the sand.

“Ah, dammit!” he said, hitting the ground hard. His face was stinging and the wind had been momentarily knocked out of his lungs. Aliana winced as she caught up to them, with BB-8 ejecting a small arm and shocking Finn in the leg, much to the latter’s displeasure.

“What’s your hurry, thief?!” Rey demanded, holding her staff to Finn’s neck.

“Thief! I’m not- ah!” Finn cried out as the droid shocked him again. “I’m not a thief!”

“This droid says that jacket belongs to his master!” Rey snapped back. BB-8 gave out a determined series of beeps and primed his shock arm.

Finn fell silent as his eyes turned toward the droid, clarity dawning on him. “It belong to Poe Dameron, right? That was his name?”

The droid beeped in a manner Finn could only assume as affirmative.

“He was on board a First Order ship, taken prisoner from a village raid. I tried to help him escape, but our ship was shot down.” Finn then turned to BB-8 with a guilty look on his face, “I’m sorry... Poe didn’t make it.”

The group fell silent save for the low mournful whine BB-8 made. Aliana glanced at each of them, keeping her expression as neutral as possible. There was a chance, however slim a coincidence it might be, that Dameron was the pilot currently sealed in her medbay. Not wanting to get anyone’s hopes up before she could confirm it, she kept silent as she watched BB-8 slowly roll away.

“So you’re with the Resistance then?” Rey asked after a moment.

Finn blinked, unprepared for that question. Taking the brief moment it took for him to stand back up to think, he decided to go with that cover story. “Uh... yes. Yes I’m with the Resistance. Yup that’s me a Resistance fighter.... This is what we look like... some of us... some of us look different.”

Aliana nodded, but she could tell Finn was lying. For whatever reason, she would soon find out. Rey, however, seemed to light up at the notion. She turned away from the two and withdrew her water canteen, taking a much-needed gulp.

“BB-8 says he’s on a secret mission, he says he has to get back to your base,” she said excitedly.

“Apparently he has a map that leads straight to Luke Skywalker,” Finn explained.

There was the sound of something breaking and the two of them turned to see Aliana clutching her water canteen, which was now buckled with shards of steel cutting into her hand. Her face looked like she’d just seen a ghost. Skywalker. The Grand Master of the Jedi Order. The droid had a map that led straight to him. Already her mind was swimming with thoughts of vengeance, of making Skywalker suffer for how he’d wronged her and her family. Oh how she wanted nothing more than to make Luke beg for mercy at her feet...

Finn wasn’t sure what it was that got Aliana so worked up but what really caught his eye was the unmistakable alabaster armour of a Stormtrooper he saw a few yards behind her. Fear clutched tightly to him as he started taking steps back. “Oh, damn. They’re already here.” Finn said grimly, prompting an alarmed ringing from BB-8. “Come on we gotta move!” he said, swiftly grabbing Rey’s hand and running in the opposite direction.

“What the-” Rey balked as she was yanked away. “Hey! I can walk you know!”

Aliana, who had spaced out completely after learning what BB-8 had, snapped out of her trance and turned to look behind her, her pupils shrinking at the sight of Stormtroopers running toward them. The Stormtroopers weren’t the problem, it was what they implied. Apparently the Dark Jedi had failed to heed her warning, and now she’d just gotten Rey caught up in her mess. She turned back to see Finn dragging Rey off and opted not to follow, instead igniting her lightsaber and deflecting Stormtrooper fire away from their dwindling silhouettes.

Rey attempted to turn back to see if Aliana followed them. She didn’t want her to get caught by the Stormtroopers. Unfortunately, another platoon obscured her vision of the other woman as they were running straight for them. The two moved to dodge their blaster fire, ducking low and trying not to run in a straight line. Luckily the stands and tents that littered the outpost made excellent cover.

As they ducked into a tent, Rey finally had a chance to catch her breath as she realized the implications of baster fire, “They were shooting at both of us...”

“They saw you with me, you’re marked,” Finn explained as he dug through the crates looking for a blaster.

“Thanks for that!” Rey scowled.

“Hey, I’m not the one who chased you down with a stick!” Finn retorted, digging through another crate. “Does no one here carry a blaster!?” he asked in frustration as none of the crates he examined bore fruit.

“Where’s Aliana?” Rey asked, glancing out the tent flap, “Wasn’t she right behind us?”

BB-8 tilted his head out slightly, saying he detected no visual lock on Aliana.

“We have to find her.” Finn said. “She has a ship that can get us outta here!”

“And also she might be in danger?” Rey said incredulously.

Finn froze momentarily, feeling ashamed of himself for immediately jumping to how Aliana would be useful to them over her safety. Why did he do that? Lingered First Order conditioning, probably? “Uh... yeah that too... sorry...”

Out in the village, Aliana was cutting down Stormtroopers and shepherding the scavengers toward the shipyard where all of Plutt’s transports were waiting when she heard the scream of TIE fighters overhead. She whirled around to see a half a dozen fighters closing in quickly for a strafing run. Acting fast, she threw her hand out and flicked it to the side, watching as one of the fighters suddenly veered off course and collided with another.

Turning her eyes back to the fleeing scavengers, most of them were piling into transports and making rushed attempts to start them. One was destroyed by the fighters before it could even get its engines running. Seeing no time to waste, she lifted both her hands and grabbed each ship with the Force, lifting them all off the ground and pointing them toward the sky. Giving each engine a jolt of Force Lightning, she smiled as they ignited and the transports and freighters all roared to life and took off at top speed out of Jakku’s atmosphere. She just hoped that someone could fly each of them.

As Finn and Rey darted across the outpost in the direction of the emptying shipyard, Rey spotted Aliana. She yanked her hand out of Finn’s grip and darted towards the other woman as fast as she could. Relief and adrenaline carrying her feet. “Oh thank god, you’re safe,” she said stopping in front of her, grabbing her shoulder.

“The scavengers are-” Aliana stopped when she realized what Rey had just said and her cheeks flushed slightly. How long had it been since anyone had expressed concern for her safety? “I... thanks for the concern,” she smiled.

“We don’t have time!” Finn shouted, catching up to them. “We need to get in your ship and get out of here. They’ll glass this whole planet if we’re still on it.”

Aliana looked back at the fighters turning around, then back to the shipyard. Two ships remained. The Fury, and an old Corellian Freighter. She pointed to the Freighter and patted Rey’s shoulder,

“You fly that out of here, I’ll follow along in the Fury. Two ships stand a better chance of getting out alive than just the one.”

A part of Rey wanted to protest. Say that she didn’t want Aliana to fly against First Order ships alone. Another part of her understood that it was the best chance of survival they had. She nodded and turned to run towards the other freighter, Finn and BB-8 following her. “Be careful!” She called out.

Aliana smiled and nodded, waving as she sprinted back toward the Fury. Now that Rey and Finn weren’t in sight, she was free to use the Force without restraint. She focused hard to redirect as much fire as she could while boarding the Fury and igniting the engines. “2V, get in the co-pilot seat!” she yelled as she tore up the ramp and into the cockpit, sitting down in the pilot’s chair. “We’re making an emergency launch!”

“Oh dear!” 2V cried out, waddling into one of the Fury’s cockpit seats. “I do wish these emergency launches weren’t so common with you, Master.”

“Yeah well I wish we weren’t being shot at right now, we don’t always get what we wish for!” Aliana snapped as she gunned the engines and pulled the Fury up in a steep climb.

Meanwhile, Rey and Finn were running into the cockpit of their freighter, an old hunk of scrap that Rey had nothing but disdain for. She sat in the pilot seat and immediately set to work prepping an emergency launch. “You sure you can fly this thing!?” Finn asked nervously.

“This ship hasn’t flown in years!” Rey answered back. “There’s a turret gun in the back! Get on it! We’ll need the cover.”

Finn nodded and made for the turret. “Ok! Got it. I can do this! I can do this!”

“I can do this. I can do this,” Rey muttered to herself.

The Falcon roared and whined as the engines came to life and the ship powered up. Pulling the controls, the old freighter shakily picked up from the ground, but tilted and drove its side into the sand. The Fury soared overhead, keeping the fighters at bay, as Rey struggled to pull the Falcon into the air.

Onboard the Fury, Aliana sensed Rey’s anxiety and looked down to see the Falcon floundering in the sand. Raising her hand to it, she gave it a tug and pulled it high enough for Rey to have some room to move and it quickly righted itself and took off at impressive speed.

Rey’s eyes widened slightly as she felt the freighter rise in the air unexpectedly. She wasn’t quite sure what caused it, but given how she was able to correct her fumbling flight path, she was not about to complain.

Finn meanwhile was considerably more panicked as he attempted to shoot down the TIE fighters tailing them. With how quickly they could maneuver, as Poe had previously pointed out last night, they were difficult to target with the turret, especially considering how unintuitive the turret actually was, with the gunner’s seat rotating and dipping as he aimed the gun. Still he persisted, in no small part to Rey all but screaming at him to shoot them down.

Aliana pulled behind the fighters pursuing them, catching them in a crossfire between the Falcon’s turrets and the Fury’s main cannons. They attempted to break off from their pursuit but one of them

was clipped by the Falcon's barrage and was sent screeching into a dune. The second pulled behind the Fury and opened fire on its engines.

"2V, get the rear shields online!" Aliana growled as she gave up trying to read the ship's sensors and stuck to the Force to figure out where the fighter had gone to. She quickly found it off her back end, to the east. It was flying at an odd angle to the Fury's sensors. No wonder she couldn't find it. She was bad enough with the ship's systems to begin with, a fighter playing hide and seek on her only exacerbated her uneven skill set.

"At once, master!" 2V said loyally as he walked less than quickly to the shield controls.

The fighter was hot on the Fury's tail. Despite its proximity, however, the pilot opted to fire in front of the ship's path rather than attempt to hit it dead on. It seemed the fighter chose to aim where Aliana would be rather than where she currently was. Aliana felt a prickling in the back of her head and immediately veered the Fury to the right, out of the path of cannon fire that had only just left the fighter when she turned.

"IN THE NAME OF-" she swore, pulling the ship back on course, "Well it's a good thing the First Order already knows I'm Sith or that could have been a problem."

On the Falcon, Finn's eyebrows raised as he saw the Fury turn out of oncoming fire a fraction of a second before the fighter had even fired a shot. That was either insanely lucky, or... he shook his head and pushed the thought from his mind. This wasn't the time or the place, he thought as he opened fire on the now exposed fighter.

Rey was occupied with trying to keep the ship out of the fighter's line of fire. While the ship was manoeuvrable, the endless desert gave them few options in terms of cover. It was then she noticed the massive ruined Star Destroyer just out of the corner of her eye. Committing the thought to consideration for a hair of a second, she veered hard right and flew them into the scrapped, hollow exhaust port of the vessels stern.

"... Rey, what are you doing!?" Finn called back, suddenly seeing that their surroundings were a lot more compact.

"Trust me!" she replied. "We'll lose them here... I hope!" She was jeering the controls to and fro all but frantically as she narrowly dodged the wreckage from inside the destroyer. Alas, the pilot tailing them proved just as nimble and didn't give them an inch of breathing room.

Aliana hadn't followed them into the Star Destroyer and hovered overhead trying frantically to find them, "2V, go to the nose of the ship, I'm going to see if I can get a read on them," she said as she got out of the pilot's chair and into the Captain's chair in the middle of the cockpit.

She leaned back against it and closed her eyes, focusing as she tried to sense the three people inside the Destroyer. It didn't take too long, but Rey was pulling every single switch and button she could find to get the ship through the wreckage unscathed. Aliana didn't dare touch the Falcon, lest she send it off course, so she resolved to redirect the fighter's cannon fire as best she could, ensuring it struck everything except her friends.

Soon enough the ships were out of the destroyer, the freighter scraping against the durasteel of the crashed ships hull on the way out.

"The gun's stuck!" Rey heard Finn call up.

“What!?” she asked.

“It’s stuck in the forward position!” Finn replied. I can’t turn it around!”

Rey felt a pit grow in her stomach. They couldn’t fire at the fighter behind them and she didn’t know if she could shake them off. Quickly looking around, Aliana’s ship wasn’t in their line of sight, so they couldn’t rely on her to shoot them down. If there were only a way to get the fighter in front of them.

Rey looked up, another idea half formed in her head before she was already deciding on it. As fast as the thrusters could go, she took the freighter up into the sky. The fighter stayed hot on their track, preparing to jump into hyperspace after them. But Rey wasn’t trying to get the ship off world. Instead, just as she began reaching the ends of the atmosphere, she disengaged the thrusters and pitched the ship into a forward roll as it plummeted toward the ground. The ship began swiftly coming back down to the planet’s surface, the speeding fighter now clear in front of them.

“Now!” shouted Rey.

Finn didn’t hesitate. Taking aim, he shot down the momentarily confused fighter. Screaming in excitement and relief as the fighter exploded into a cloud of smoke and shrapnel, Rey pulled the ship out of its death-plunge and back into the atmosphere. Her excitement was replaced by a startling jolt when the Fury passed by overhead, moving in such a way as to indicate that they should follow.

They both pulled out into space and away from Jakku, flying at sublight speeds away from the planet’s vicinity and far enough out so as to not be detectable. There was an audible clunk overhead as the Fury docked with the Falcon before the top ladder opened up and Aliana dropped inside.

“Are you two okay?” she asked, looking around for any sign of Rey and Finn.

Rey popped up from underneath the ship's floors, a warm sincere smile on her face. “Better than this ship is. That’s for sure. It’s a miracle it didn’t fall apart in that dogfight.” Her head dipped down into the compartment she was sitting in. “Could one of you hand me the hydro spanner?”

Finn looked around and picked up something cylindrical. “You mean this?”

Rey looked up at the piece. “No, the hydro spanner!”

Finn continuously started picking up every spare piece that was around him only for Rey to continuously say no. “Look at where I’m pointing! That one!”

Aliana kicked the right tool into Finn’s hand, which he then threw to Rey. Looking up at her and mouthing ‘*Thank you.*’ Aliana offered him a thumbs up.

“What’s wrong with the ship?” She asked, looking alarmed at how frantically Rey was working.

“There’s an energy flux in the hyperdrive motivator causing a fuel backup,” Rey explained as she continued trying to repair the decades old engine, “If I don’t get it fixed the entire ship will flood with poisonous gas! I need the bonding tape, hurry!” Rey exclaimed as Finn and Aliana set about looking through... way too many rolls of tape for any ship to have.

“Uh... Rey, there’s a lot of tape here,” Aliana said, looking worried.

“The yellow one!” Rey yelled from inside the compartment.

Aliana grabbed it and threw it into the compartment, where she heard a soft ‘smack.’

“Ow!” Rey exclaimed, “That was my finger!”

“Sorry!”

BB-8 simply wooed solemnly at the awkward situation the three humans were in.

“Hopefully we can get this ship fixed before long. We gotta get out of here before the First Order’s patrols find us,” Finn remarked as he watched Rey work.

“No. YOU two need to get out of here,” Rey corrected standing back up. “I have to get back to Jakku.”

“What!? Why does everyone want to go to Jakku!?” Finn asked incredulously.

“Thank you!” Aliana smiled, feeling vindicated that at least one other person on the ship hated Jakku as much as she did.

Finn scooched forward to look down into the compartment, “Rey, you could take this ship anywhere. Why would you want to go back to Jakku? Do you have a family? You got a boyfriend? Girlfriend?”

Rey popped her head up, “None of your business, that’s why!” Then her brow furrowed. “Wait, what was that last one?”

Aliana’s eyes widened as she turned to look behind her. She could sense a presence out in space closing in on them. It had been faint, and she’d first thought it was the cruiser orbiting Jakku. But it was different now. Closer. “We’re in trouble!”

Rey and Finn both cocked their eyebrows in confusion before there was a roar outside. The two of them rushed to the cockpit to see a massive freighter opening up its hangar doors to encase the Falcon and the Fury.

“How did she do that?” Finn asked quietly. “How did she know that would happen?”

“I have no idea...” The two of them were stunned at the situation. They had just barely gotten free of the First Order and already they were caught in another trap. They couldn’t identify the freighter that was trapping them, and as such they couldn’t be clear if they were hostile or friendly.

“Alright, here’s the deal,” Aliana said, looking at the two of them. “We’re about to be boarded any second now. I need you two to get under the floor and don’t come back up until I say so.”

“You can’t handle a boarding party all by yourself!” Rey protested.

“I have a few tricks they won’t be prepared for,” Aliana countered with a smirk.

“I don’t think a broken lightsaber is going to help you out of this one!” Rey chastised.

“Ugh, you’re impossible!” Aliana growled as she grabbed Rey by the upper arms and lifted her off her feet to drop her down into the floor space, before turning to Finn, “You! Get in, now!”

Finn hurried down to the floor space, unwilling to give Aliana an excuse to use her supposedly broken lightsaber. As he hunkered down beside Rey, Aliana grabbed the sheet of metal and placed it back over the hole in the floor.

“Now stay. Here. And don’t make any noise.” she said with finality before standing back up and walking down the corridor.

The two of them were silent for a moment before Rey spoke up. “She lifted me up like I weighed nothing,” she said softly.

“Yeeah, she doesn’t seem like someone you wanna get mad,” Finn said with a nod, turning and glancing at Rey. Her face was flushed and she was staring at the floor, “You okay?”

“I think so?” Rey said, turning her back to him and putting a hand over her face as she mouthed ‘*OH MY GOD!*’ She’d never met anyone strong enough to just casually lift her like that, at least nobody who was human. She had been so surprised by it that she didn’t think to object to being shunted under the floor. Or touched for that matter.

Above, Aliana stepped out of the lounge and into the corridor, waiting for the door to open. There was a series of clunks and rattles before the docking port slid open and an old man ran onto the ship with a Wookie in tow, both carrying blasters.

“That’s far enough,” Aliana said, pulling her lightsaber off her belt.

The old man narrowed his gaze at Aliana. The wookie let out a roar as he aimed his bowcaster at her.

“Hang on, Chewie!” the man said, holding a hand up. He placed his own blaster at his side before taking a single cautionary step towards Aliana. “Not every day I see two ships with one pilot,” he said almost dismissively. “I take it that one ship up top is yours. How’d you get your hands on this one?”

“It was rusting in a desert in the middle of nowhere,” Aliana said, her lightsaber still gripped tightly in her hand, her thumb hovering over the activation switch, “And that’s all you need to know.”

“Well then I’m sure you won’t mind us taking this one,” the old man responded. “You can keep yours if you like. Doesn’t look like it would go for much on the market anyway.”

Chewie snorted in a way that could be interpreted as laughter. Aliana narrowed her eyes at the old man. He had quite a pompous attitude for someone staring down the emitter of a lightsaber. She admired the courage it took to just presume to take a ship from her, at the very least. “Seems you have a big enough ship,” Aliana cast a scowl to the Wookie. “And don’t test me, Wookie, I don’t need a lightsaber to take you out.”

Any retort the old man was about to give when he heard a series of beeps behind him. Turning around he saw the head of BB-8 just before it turned back around the corner.

“Ah great,” he said with a grumble. “Chewie search the rest of the ship. Make sure there aren’t any other passengers.”

Aliana panicked. She couldn’t have this Wookie searching through the ship. While she knew Wookies could be friendly, she had no idea what temperament this one had been bred with.

Wookies that travelled with humans were often fiercely loyal to their companions and violently hostile to everything else.

She lifted her hand and gripped the muscles in their legs, rooting them in place. “You two aren’t searching anything,” she said, flicking her hand and ripping their weapons out of their grips. “BB-8, go lock down the ship.”

BB-8 extended a mechanical appendage and mimicked a salute before rolling down the corridor.

The old man and wookiee both struggled against the hold, but to no avail. He turned his gaze back at Aliana. “Well... you don’t strike me as a Jedi,” he said through gritted teeth. “You with the First Order?”

“No,” Aliana narrowed her eyes, “Now, unless you want to be in pieces on the floor, I suggest you tell me who you are and why you’re boarding my ship.”

“Your ship?” the old man asked in offense. “Well pardon me, honey, but I’ll be damned if I let a Sith have the Falcon.”

Aliana cocked an eyebrow, “Falcon?” she looked genuinely surprised for a moment before hardening her glare. “Your name. Now.”

“Han Solo,” he said with an air of smugness. “This is Chewbacca. Perhaps you heard of us? Helped save the galaxy from your predecessors and all that?”

Chewie huffed in agreement.

Aliana’s eyes widened. She had heard of them in fact. Her mother had taught her about recent galactic history. Her love of her mother’s stories was the reason she became a historian in the first place. Han Solo was a war hero of the New Republic. And an ally to the Jedi. That made her wary, but objectively she knew he wasn’t an immediately threat. She released the two of them from her grip and turned on her heel to open the door to the lounge, “Rey, Finn, come out. They aren’t hostile.”

Han and Chewie were left slightly stunned, rather surprised that hearing their names didn’t prompt the Sith to kill them but instead regard them as non hostile. Their confusion only grew as they walked down the corridor to see two people around the same age climb out of the floor.

Finn eyed the two with caution, his gaze all but fixed on the Wookiee. “... And they are?” he asked.

“Apparently, this is Han Solo and Chewbacca,” Aliana said. “And believe it or not, we’re on the Millennium Falcon.”

“Wha- ARE YOU SERIOUS!” Rey asked with a wide grin, darting between Han and Chewie with a look of wonder and excitement.

“Yeah she’s serious,” Han said, stepping past them and into the cockpit, “This is my ship. Now who’d you steal it from?”

“Unkar Plutt,” Rey answered. “On Jakku.”

“Jakku? Unbelievable,” Han grumbled before turning and walking back towards the cockpit. “Well you can tell Plutt that Han Solo just took it back!”

“I’m sorry, but what’s going on?” Finn asked.

“That’s Han Solo! The rebellion leader in the last war!” Rey answered. “And this is the Millenium Falcon! This ship is legendary! It made the Kessel Run in less than fourteen parsecs!”

“TWELVE!” Han yelled from down the corridor.

Aliana followed him into the cockpit, feeling nervous. She could take Solo if it came to blows, but he knew she was Sith. And she didn't want him telling Rey. “I’m sorry about all that before. When people board a ship you tend to be on edge and I didn’t want anything dangerous to get to my friends.”

Han turned to face Aliana and gave her a shrug. “Eh, no harm done. Honestly I’m rather impressed that you didn’t just kill us from the word go. Never seen that much self restraint from a Si-” he was cut by a finger placed on his lips.

“THAT has to remain a secret right now.” she stressed.

Han looked down the corridor where Finn and Rey were. “Wait, your ‘friends’ don’t know?”

“No, they don’t,” Aliana hissed, “Or at least I hope they don’t. They haven’t run away yet, so I’m pretty sure they don’t. And I don’t want them to find out either.”

Han narrowed his eyes at Aliana. “You’re not planning on hurting them, are you?”

“No!” Aliana spat. “I just... I need to keep a low profile and the more people know, the more they’re in danger.”

Han was quiet as he thought about it for a moment. “... I’ll keep your secret in exchange for this ship back.”

Aliana sighed. “Alright done.”

“So which is it?” Han asked curiously as he sat down in the cockpit’s seat.

“What?” Aliana looked confused.

“I don’t need the Force to be able to tell that you care about one of them a lot more than the other,” Han said, fiddling with the Falcon’s controls, “So which one is it?”

Aliana was surprised that she’d been read that easily by a complete stranger. She’d been easy for her mother to read when she was younger, and she knew she could be a mess around women, but that this old man who was probably older than the Galactic Empire could figure her out was alarming. If he could read her, who else could? “...The girl,” she said, leaning against the doorway.

“Does she know?” he asked.

“I just told you she doesn’t.”

“I don’t mean you being Sith.”

“...No,” she answered quietly.

“Alright that’s two secrets I’m keeping. Now you owe me,” he said with a smirk.

“You bantha’s ass,” she said with a glare.

She turned to leave when something flashed through her mind and she stopped. She could sense... a lot of people. A lot of people who were mad, and greedy, and... a First Order bounty...

Oh no, she thought. Mercenaries.

“Solo, someone’s boarding the ship you came here on,” she said, “And they’re not happy.”

Han looked at her with confusion that was soon replaced with irritation. “Ah hell, not them. Alright stay here, I’ll handle this,” he said, getting up from his seat.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea,” Aliana countered.

“And why not?”

“I have a feeling,” she said, turning and sprinting down into the Falcon’s lounge. Rey and Finn were sat there trying to work out what was going on when she burst into the room, “We have to leave, now!”

The two of them looked up, confused, “What?” Rey asked.

“There are people boarding Solo’s freighter, and they have a First Order bounty,” Aliana explained, opening the top hatch to the Fury, “We have to get out of here now!”

“Look missy! That freighter is packed to the brim with valuable cargo. I’m not gonna abandon that ship for this one just becau-”

The group suddenly heard a loud explosion followed by the entire ship shaking.

“What was that?” Rey asked, panic clear on her face.”

“... That was probably the sound of the freighters hyperdrive being blown up,” Han groaned with irritation.

Aliana looked at Han in mock surprise, “Oh hey, how about that? Alright, the four of you get out of here, I’ll cover you in the Fury,” she said as she started to ascend the ladder to her ship.

“Wait!” Rey said, racing after Aliana. “I’ll come with you!”

“Rey, I think it’s best if you stay here,” Aliana said. “We shouldn’t split up more than we have to.”

“I don’t feel right leaving you alone in all of this,” Rey countered, “The Falcon’s fit to fly, it doesn’t need me to repair it anymore. So I’m coming with you.”

“The wookiee is eating your staff,” Aliana said pointing behind her.

“You honestly expect me to fall for that?” Rey asked, not taking her eyes off of Aliana.

Aliana groaned. “Worth a try. Alright come on,” she said begrudgingly. “Finn, BB-8, you two stay here. If the First Order detects us splitting up they’ll have to decide who to follow. We’ll meet up

somewhere once we're in the clear, alright?"

Finn nodded, "Got it. I'll keep the droid safe, you two keep each other safe. Or else."

Rey smiled warmly at Finn as she ascended the chute and stepped into the Fury's cargo hold. Aliana gave Finn an equally warm smile and nodded, "Thanks Finn."

She followed after Rey, turning to look at Han, "Where do you wanna meet up?"

"You know Maz Kanata's place?" Han asked.

"Takodana? Yeah, I'll be there." Aliana nodded, pulling herself up the chute and sealing it shut.

Han sighed as he stepped into the Falcon's cockpit, "C'mon, kid. Let's make you useful."

On board the Fury, Aliana and Rey were detaching the ship and preparing it for Hyperspace when 2V tapped her on the shoulder.

"Miss Beniko! I hate to trouble you, but the patient in the medical bay has regained consciousness."

Aliana brightened up at these words, "Is he lucid?"

"Unfortunately he's groaning and fidgeting. He couldn't respond to my questions on who he was."

"Put him under and seal off the medbay," Aliana shook her head, "There's a Resistance safehouse on the way to Takodana, we'll hand him off there."

Rey's face lit up. "We're actually going to the Resistance?"

"Just to drop off the patient!" Aliana stressed. "We should be in and out of there on the way to Takodana. The safehouses are for mercenaries, black market suppliers and friendly ships. I'm all three so I have the coordinates for most of them. There aren't any major personnel there in case they're discovered and they won't give me coordinates to the base. We need BB-8 to get there."

"Why are we going to Takodana?" Rey asked.

"Han's suggestion. There's a woman who runs a pirate's haven who can offer shelter until we can get a message across the galaxy," Aliana said before looking up to see the hangar doors were still closed and the bounty hunters were already inside. "Ah hell. One second."

She aimed the Fury's guns at the hangar door. In a few shots, she blasted it open, clearing their exit and jettisoning a few of the mercenaries into space. "Good to know Han was too cheap to invest in ray shields. Rey, get us out of here. I'll chart a course."

Rey got into the pilot's seat and took the controls while Aliana turned to the navigation chart, entering the coordinates for the safehouse and Takodana. Below them, the Falcon was already speeding out of the hangar and jumped to lightspeed, with the Fury following not long after.

Aliana finally breathed a sigh of relief as she flopped down in the Captain's chair, "Well that was a close one..."

Rey turned around from the controls to give Aliana a fond smirk. "Is everyday this exciting for you?" she asked.

“Not always,” Aliana said with an equally warm smile. “Usually days this exciting don’t involve a pretty lady.”

“What, you let the droid do all the work for you?” Rey snickered.

There was a moment of dead silence as both women soon realized what they’d just said to each other, and turned away to conceal the blush on their faces.

“So... how long to the safehouse?” Rey asked.

“Six hours,” Aliana said, her eyes locked to the navigational chart, “And another three days to Takodana.”

“I see,” Rey said, still somewhat flustered by her own behavior. “Well... if that’s the case. Do you have any more of that stuff you made the last time I was here?”

“Yeah, I should,” Aliana nodded, thankful for an excuse to get up. Three days on the Fury alone with Rey? This was exactly why she wanted her to stay on the Falcon.

Always Like This Around Girls

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The Fury was an amazing ship! One of the biggest ships Rey had ever seen. She hadn't had the opportunity to really take in just how large it was the last time she'd been here, but already she was crunching the numbers of salvage that could be held inside the craft.

She'd thought the Fury was a freighter like the Falcon. But she was wrong. It was a warship that Aliana (or more likely her family before) had converted into a mobile home. She could easily discern what was a modification and what was standard issue, and much of the amenities, such as the large refresher and dining area, were things that had been added recently. Even the crew quarters had been converted into two small bedrooms, one of which she had laid the few things she'd taken with her from Jakku.

The first day had been consumed by Rey exploring the ship between hyperspace corrections and finding all the little nooks and crannies she could. She'd even searched through the cargo hold, though several crates and a large cabinet had been sealed with identification locks.

Aliana allowed the bout of curiosity without issue. She had no qualms with Rey exploring the ship as whatever she didn't need to see was safely locked away and most of everything else was acceptable, 'homey' design. In all honesty, it was rather adorable seeing Rey examine and subsequently gush over so much of the ship. It wasn't often that she had a guest that was overflowing with so much peppy optimism. At least, not optimism that wasn't synthesized like 2V. Having Rey aboard the Fury was a nice change of pace.

"There's just one thing, I don't understand," Rey said as she took a bite of polystarch that she raided from the pantry.

"And what would that be?" Aliana asked.

"How did you manage to put in all of these modifications to your ship when you couldn't even fix your own hyperdrive?" Rey asked curiously.

"My ancestors put most of them in. Others I hired actual mechanics to install," Aliana said with a smile.

Rey's eyes widened slightly. "So you can travel anywhere you want and just pay anyone to do what you need done to your ship? How rich are you?"

"Whoa there!" Aliana said, putting a hand up. "Get to know a girl a little better before you start asking for her net worth."

Rey put on a slightly embarrassed expression. "I'm sorry, it's just... I can't help but be curious. In the short time we've known each other you've shown to be one of the most peculiar women I've ever met."

"I'm not the only freelancer out there," Aliana smiled, "We get by pretty well, and I know where to go to find valuable bartering tools when I need them."

“You don’t see many freelancers on Jakku,” Rey countered, taking another bite of her dinner, “Wouldn’t most of that work be closer to the Core?”

Aliana’s face fell and she averted her eyes, “I uh... I try not to go near the core.”

Rey tilted her head. “Why not?”

Time appeared to slow down for Aliana as she wracked her brain for a swift and believable response. Piecing together an excuse, she unclipped her lightsaber from her belt and put it on the table. “This thing sadly,” she replied. “You go near the core world with one of these on your hip and everyone and their grandmother thinks you’re a jedi and starts pleading for your help. Without charge, I might add.”

Rey couldn’t help but smile at that. “You don’t seem to me like the kind of woman who would mind charity work,” she countered.

“Usually not, but when it’s non stop, you have to draw the line somewhere,” Aliana explained. “I still need to make a living, you know.”

“Have you thought of not keeping the lightsaber on your belt?” Rey asked with a shrug.

Aliana bristled hard at that remark, but tried her best to bury it. As far as Rey knew, it was a piece of junk used to intimidate people and had no value. And she thought that way because that was what Aliana had told her. Taking a slow breath, she shook her head, “It’s too good of a deterrent to people causing trouble. Since I spent most of my time in the Outer Rim and the Unknown Regions, it’s best I keep it.”

“The Unknown Regions?” Rey asked, her interest piqued. “What are those like?”

“Oh, quiet varied from planet to planet,” Aliana replied, internally relieved by the shift in conversation. “Worlds untouched by the cultural influence of the Republic and the Imperial remnant have a vast array of cultures.”

“I’ve heard people say it’s dangerous out there,” Rey added, “Is that true?”

“About as dangerous as any uncharted region of space is,” Aliana explained, “You go in blind, without astrogation charts or hyperspace routes. So if you aren’t careful you end up in an ion storm or asteroid belt. You have to plot your routes slowly. If you just jump to a planet you risk slamming into a moon that you didn’t see in the way.”

“Wow,” Rey said. “That sounds like it could take awhile.”

“Indeed,” Aliana nodded. “Best not to go into the unknown regions if you’re not prepared to be there for a long time.”

“So, where does Takodana fall on the star charts?” Rey asked.

Aliana took a moment to consider. “It’s... closer to the core worlds, but only just. Honestly in post old republic days, there aren’t many safe places for criminals near the core that isn’t the deep recesses of Coruscant.”

“I thought you said you were a mercenary?” Rey asked, “Why go to a criminal hideout?”

“Tricksters sit with others in peace, because they know there’s no point trying to outsmart a trickster,” Aliana explained, “Smugglers Dens and Pirate Havens like Takodana are good places to disappear and be in relative peace. Especially with Maz running the place.”

“And we know that this Maz can help us?” Rey asked

“Han Solo certainly thinks so. He knew Luke better than anyone else... save Princess Leia. If he thinks she can help then he has my vote of confidence.”

Rey nodded, a wide smile suddenly plastered on her face. “I still can’t believe we got to meet THE Han Solo. I mean, the man’s a legend!”

“A crusty legend,” Aliana amended.

“Still a legend!” Rey asserted, “I mean, he was right there alongside Luke Skywalker taking down the Galactic Empire!”

“I mean, they didn’t do that good of a job. Otherwise the First Order wouldn’t be around,” Aliana scoffed, taking a bite of her dinner for the first time since they sat down, “My mother was incensed when the Republic signed the treaty with the Empire. She wanted to hunt them down to the last Stormtrooper.”

“You have a mother?” Rey asked.

“...Had,” Aliana corrected.

Rey’s eyes widened, suddenly feeling foolish. “Oh, I’m sorry,” she said softly. “What ha-”

“I’m not going to talk about it,” Aliana cut her off.

They sat in silence for a moment, the tone much colder than it was a moment ago.

“It’s my family,” Rey said, breaking the silence. “The people I’m waiting for back on Jakku.”

Aliana nodded her head. “I figured as much. Can’t imagine you’d voluntarily stay on that sandpit for anyone else. Where are they off to?”

Rey shrugged, “I don’t know.”

Aliana cocked an eyebrow, “How long have you been waiting for them?”

“Twelve years,” Rey said, “They left me on the planet when I was very little. Didn’t tell me where they were going or when they would be back.”

Aliana’s stony expression fell and was replaced by one of pure sympathy, “Oh my god... Rey... I’m so sorry.”

Rey put on a look of confusion, although a discerning eye may have noticed it came off as slightly forced. “What are you sorry for? I’m sure they’ll explain everything to me if- when! -when they get back.”

Aliana’s mouth formed a thin line. She internally debated if she should tell Rey that her parents weren’t coming back and she should make peace with that. Clinging to false hope like this wasn’t

healthy. Still, Rey was especially stubborn. She had to be if she wanted to survive on Jakku of all places. Even if Aliana made her case as calmly and sympathetically as she could, it wasn't guaranteed that Rey would plug her ears and lash out at her nay-saying. There was a time and place for this sort of thing and the remaining 5 days they had left cooped up in this ship may not have been it.

"...Well contact me when they get back," Aliana said between a bit of her dinner. "I don't care how good an excuse they have for leaving a child on a desert planet, I am reading them the riot act."

That response got a soft laugh from Rey. Aliana took another bite of her polystarch and smiled as the tension in the room had lifted. As she ate, she quietly pondered telling Rey about her mother. She'd certainly earned the courtesy after telling her who she was waiting for on Jakku. And it's not like any harm would be done, as long as she didn't name names.

"Alright, well I guess I can tell you about mine," Aliana said, taking a deep breath, "My mother was murdered by a Jedi Master on Corellia about nine years ago."

Rey coughed on her polystarch as Aliana revealed that. After pounding on her chest furiously to clear her throat, she looked back up at Aliana in incredulity. "A Jedi!? Why!?"

Aliana shrugged, trying to keep a look of uncertainty on her face. "Must have thought she was a threat of some kind. It was hard to catch all the details over the sounds of screaming and swinging lightsabers."

"Lightsabers plural? Who else was there?" Rey asked, scooching closer to Aliana and looking more baffled by the minute.

"The Jedi's Padawan," Aliana explained, "Attacked her two on one before coming after me."

She rolled up her sleeve and showed Rey a patch of rough, uneven skin running up her upper arm.

"See that? Took the Padawan's lightsaber tip to the arm," she explained.

Rey looked upon the wound with an expression of abject horror. "I... I just can't believe it!" Rey said. "I-I mean it's not like I think you're lying or anything! It's just... I always thought the Jedi were supposed to be guardians of peace. Why would they attack you or your mother?"

"I don't know," Aliana shook her head, "I didn't stick around to find out. I just got on the Fury and ran for my life. I don't even know what they did with my mother's body after that." Another lie. She knew exactly what they'd done. They burned her mother as if she were garbage.

"I... I'm sorry," Rey said, placing a hand on Aliana's. "I can't imagine what it was like to go through that."

Aliana felt warmth rise in her cheeks from the contact. She couldn't help but smile and place her other hand atop Rey's. "Thank you," she replied softly. "It's... not often I get to talk to people about this who don't immediately assume I'm lying."

Rey felt a pang of sympathy for her. As much as she knew deep down in her heart that her parents weren't coming back, she knew they were out there somewhere. And if they weren't, she was blissfully ignorant of that fact. Not only did Aliana know her mother was dead, she watched it happen and still didn't know why.

Aliana felt her face grow red from Rey's continued contact and withdrew her hands, coughing discreetly. In that moment, she felt a surge of confidence rise within her. Rey believing her was a comforting reassurance. Maybe she *could* tell her. "Um... there is something I did want to tell you, acutally. I-"

"Excuse me, Miss Beniko!" 2V said as he came waddling into the room, "But we are arriving at the Resistance safehouse!"

Aliana cursed the droid's timing and pulled her lightsaber off the table, hooking it back to her belt and standing up from her seat, "Alright, get the pilot ready. I want to be in and out as quickly as possible."

"If that is the case, perhaps we can simply lower the docking ramp and simply toss him into the safehouse?" 2V suggested before walking back towards the cockpit.

"We need to exhibit a little more decorum than that, 2V," Aliana said, rolling her eyes as she walked towards the medbay.

Rey braced herself as 2V brought the ship out of hyperspace. She looked over to see Aliana pushing an unconscious man out on a roller. "Who is that?" she asked.

"Not sure," Aliana said plainly. "I found him in some wreckage on Jakku and he was too banged up to tell me anything. I figured this safehouse might be the best place to take him, considering."

Rey looked outside to see a mobile station on a set drift course around the empty space. It was so far off the hyperspace routes that it was nearly impossible to find through conventional means. The station looked to be about five times the size of the Fury and was clearly intended for quick stops and temporary hideaways. As her first taste of the Resistance, it was quite impressive.

Aliana brought the ship to dock with the station and then immediately left the controls to help 2V guide the stretcher with the pilot on it to the docking port. She stopped as 2V came out of the medbay and turned back to Rey.

"You wanna go inside? Look around?" she asked.

Rey couldn't deny that the idea seemed tantalizing. The thought of meeting other members of the Resistance was too good to pass up. "... Sure?" she said, trying to sound casual.

She followed the group to the ship's airlock. The hissing of pressurization filled their ears before the doors opened. They made their way down a small walk way before another set of doors opened before them.

On the other side were a troop of armed guards. They had not pointed their blasters at the group but appeared to be ready to take action if they proved hostile.

In the middle of that group was a tall older woman. She appeared far less militant, wearing robes that would suit a senator.

"Your vessel has the look of a First Order ship," she said with a calm even tone. "We almost didn't give you docking clearance."

“I appreciate that you did,” Aliana replied, trying to sound polite, “I recovered a pilot from Jakku, and I’m pretty sure he’s one of yours. May I bring him aboard?”

The senator nodded and Aliana signaled to 2V to bring the pilot into the station. It only took a glance for the senator to recognize him.

“This is Poe Dameron,” she nodded, “He’s one of ours. And known for getting into trouble at that. We’ll take him from here.”

The soldiers quickly pulled Poe from Aliana’s stretcher and placed him on one of their own before rolling down to their medbay. Only two guards stayed with the senator in case the group decided not to leave peacefully.

Aliana watched as the Resistance fighters rolled Dameron out of sight before giving the Senator a slight curtsy. “A pleasure to aid the Resistance,” she said. “Before we head out, my friend here wanted to have a look around if that would be alright with you? She was very excited about coming here.”

The senator glanced back at the guards, and then to the lightsaber on Aliana’s hip, “You have to surrender your weapon before you can enter.”

Aliana unhooked her lightsaber and handed it to her, “Of course, ma’am.”

The senator took the hilt in her hands and looked it over before nodding to the group. “Thank you,” she said. “Welcome to the safehouse.”

Rey could barely contain her excitement as she stepped further into the station. So far it was a simple series of corridors littered with people rushing from place to place as if they were busy and already behind schedule, which they might have been.

“Having fun?” Aliana asked with amusement.

“We’re in a Resistance base!” Rey exclaimed with giddiness. “We’re surrounded by people fighting for freedom in the Galaxy! This is a safehouse of heroes!”

Aliana smiled as she watched Rey become so filled to the brim with glee, inspiration, and awe at the sight of so many resistance fighters in one place. It was especially heartwarming to see her getting so worked up over rank and file grunts and pilots. Usually such reverence had been reserved for people wielding lightsabers in the past.

“You know, you don’t have to go back to Jakku,” Aliana suggested, “You could join the Resistance if they inspire you this much.”

Rey opened her mouth to respond, but the words died in her throat. Her expression went from unbridled joy to one of conflict. Deep down she knew there was nothing for her back on Jakku. Joining the Resistance seemed like the best opportunity for her. Still, there was this nagging feeling that would not leave her mind. What if her parents DID come back only to see she wasn’t there. As far as she knew, they were on Jakku that very moment. As flimsy and unreasonable the hope she had was, she couldn’t quite let go of it.

“... I’ll wait for my parents to come back,” Rey responded with a weak smile. “Then I’ll join up. They should at least know the kind of trouble I’m getting into.”

Aliana's expression grew pained as she saw Rey turn around and get back to exploring the station. It hurt to watch Rey convince herself so strongly that she needed to stay on Jakku, but didn't want to upset her. Normally she wasn't so hesitant to give someone a harsh truth they so desperately needed, but... a part of her was desperate to see Rey smile. And when she did, she felt just as happy as Rey looked.

"Alright, if you're sure," Aliana nodded.

"Master, I would advise us to return to the ship as soon as we can," 2V said. "If we linger too long, the Resistance fighters may attempt to vandalize it for its outward appearance."

"We're staying until Rey has had her fill, 2V. Make peace with that," Aliana said with a glare. "Besides, I feel like a group of freedom fighters under the leadership of an esteemed general are above such petty vandalism."

Rey meanwhile was captivated by a droid she found in the corridor and knelt down to talk to it. The sight was enough to return a smile to Aliana's face.

This was the worst part of the Captain's job. Reporting to the petulant brat that the Supreme Leader had decided to put in charge of the entire ship. Kylo Ren had been bad before, but ever since coming back from his rendezvous with the Sith on Jakku he had become considerably worse. Pasma and Hux couldn't even contain his tantrums and damage to the ship was at an all time high. Now he had to make things worse by reporting that the droid had escaped and the entire platoon sent to Jakku had been slain.

Worse, they were now harder to track as the entire population of scavengers had made it off world in a dozen ships, so it was unknown which ship the droid was hiding on.

Nevertheless, he'd prefer to face Ren's rage himself than allow the grunts under him take the fall.

"My Lord?" he said nervously as he stepped into Ren's chambers.

Ren didn't turn to look at the captain. He instead chose to continue facing a podium that held something that he obstructed from the Captain's sight. "Report Captain," he said through the deep filter of his mask.

The captain had attempted to take a discreet deep breath before he spoke. "... The droid has escaped the planet. Both it and the traitor are nowhere to be found."

Much to his surprise, Ren hadn't immediately began lashing out and instead opted to breathe heavily. It was as if he was attempting to calm himself down. "How did the platoon lose them?"

"The entire platoon had been wiped out," the Captain said plainly. "At that time, dozens of freighters had taken flight and fled the planet. We have no way of knowing which one the droid was on."

That addition was what did it. In a blink of an eye, Ren's cross-guard saber ignited and crackled with unstable power and began slashing against the walls of his own chambers.

The captain remained still, closing his eyes so that if Ren decided to turn that blade on him, he wouldn't see his demise coming. To his surprise, Ren only slashed at the walls and consoles in an

impotent rage before he finally deactivated his lightsaber.

“How could an entire platoon be wiped-” he stopped mid sentence as he quickly came to the only conclusion possible, “Of course... the Sith.”

He seethed in anger. Not only had the Sith humiliated him personally, but she had lost him the droid and the map to Skywalker with no way to attain them. This mission had been a disaster, all thanks to one exiled Sith and her meddling. Ren paced around his quarters as he thought of exactly how he would make her pay for such insolence.

“Captain, scan every last cubic meter of space around Jakku,” he growled, “I want to know every single ship that left the planet. I’ll tear them apart one by one if I have to.”

The Captain stood straight and saluted towards Ren, much as it pained him to acknowledge the brat as his superior. “Yes, my lord. Right away.” With that the captain turned on his heel and walked briskly out of the room. The physical distance he put between himself and Ren did wonders to calm his nerves.

Ren turned back to face what sat upon the podium. “I know she’s out there. No doubt planning how next she’ll choose to humiliate me. I will find her, and I will show her the true power of the dark side. As you would.”

The charred, ruined helmet of Darth Vader said nothing. It gave no indication that it could hear or understand anything Ren had just said.

“That was one of the most amazing things I have ever seen!” Rey said happily as she undocked the Fury and followed the course set for Takodana, “Thank you so much, Alie!”

“Alie?” Aliana asked, tilting her head curiously.

Rey felt a small flush of red spread over her cheeks as she turned to explain herself. “Well... We’re friends, right? I just thought that might be a cute thing to call my friend.”

Aliana was silent for a moment before a smile spread across her face. “Alie. I like it. Never had a nickname before.”

“Great!” Rey smiled as she focused her attention on the Fury’s controls, “Alie it is then!”

Aliana excused herself and she withdrew to her quarters. Once she was certain the door had been sealed, she immediately fell to the floor and whined softly. She’d tried not to let her crush get out of hand, but the more time she spent with the scavenger the more attached to her she became. And it had only been half a day since they left Jakku. Now she was looking at three more on the flight to Takodana and she was certain that if she didn’t get a handle on herself by then she would just end up embarrassing herself.

She looked up from the floor to see several objects around her had suddenly begun to float. Staring wide eyed for a moment, she soon realized that it was her doing this and then focused on putting the objects back down.

‘Right,’ she said inwardly to herself. ‘Through passion, I gain strength. Surges in emotions mean surges in power.’ It seemed that the proximity of her crush meant she was at risk of accidentally

revealing that she was force sensitive. This proved more than anything that she had to get a hold of herself. Unfortunately, her training did not include any Jedi teachings to ignore or negate emotion, only to channel them for greater power.

Left with no other recourse, she did the only thing she could do. She meditated.

In the cockpit, Rey was smiling as she flew the ship, stopping to correct course here and there. It was nice to have someone friendly to talk to after so much time alone, and Aliana had proven to be quite interesting. BB-8 was right, having friends WAS exhilarating. She almost couldn't wait to get to Takodana to get more acquainted with Finn.

But there was something prodding at the back of her mind. Aliana hadn't wanted her to come. She'd wanted her to stay on the Falcon with Finn, Han and BB-8. But they'd been having such a good time together, so why had she been so insistent on flying the Fury alone? Was she hiding something?

Rey had developed a natural inclination to distrust people over the years. Everyone had an ulterior motive as far as she was concerned. With Finn she could see it clear as day: Finn had been covertly ogling her in their brief time together. It didn't bother her, in fact she was more comfortable knowing what Finn's motives were. Aliana however, she couldn't quite read. However much she liked her, not being able to read her made her just that little bit anxious.

Maybe it was time for another conversation over breakfast tomorrow...

Aliana liked cooking. Creating something nourishing that could be enjoyed was therapeutic. Putting together ingredients in a certain pattern helped clear her head. She'd always had an affinity for organization and patterns and found them soothing. Even the steady thrum of the engines would put her in a good rhythm. And with how deeply Rey's pleasant company had been affecting her, she needed her head as clear as possible. Over the years she'd become quite good at turning ration packs into hearty meals with just a few additional ingredients. She was always careful to keep a stock of vegetables on hand as well as seasonings. With just a few extra tools she could keep an entire platoon of soldiers satisfied.

For Rey, who hadn't eaten anything aside from polystarch and veg-meat for most of her life, she was making a thick and hearty soup from vegetables and a few slices of veg meat cut up into small pieces. She quite enjoyed watching a soup turn from a pot of water to a thick and dark concoction. The way it bubbled and swirled as everything simmered was quite absorbing.

And the fact that it filled the entire ship with a pleasant aroma helped.

Rey stepped into the dining room of the ship, all but enamored with the smell of breakfast being made. She had no idea that food could smell as good as it did with Aliana prepared a meal. She could spend the rest of her life eating Aliana's cooking.

Not to mention that the two of them had no shortage of conversations whenever they sat down to eat. She could listen to Aliana talk just about anything and she'd be all but enraptured by it. Not just by the topics themselves, but by how smooth and pleasant Aliana's voice was. Even when the topic of conversation shifted to something heavy, it was never wholly unpleasant.

Which was why Rey was hoping the questions she had for Aliana this morning would go over well.

After about ten minutes of waiting, Aliana came in with a tray carrying two large bowls of something steamy. Whatever it was smelled absolutely delicious. When she set it down in front of her, she looked at the contents with curiosity.

“What is it?” she asked.

“Soup,” Aliana explained, “It’s food, but in a liquid form. It’s a good way to get a lot of mileage out of leftovers or spare ingredients.”

Rey prodded the substance with her utensil curiously. Anything that was in liquid form was a scarcity on Jakku. Seeing food this saturated in liquid was... intriguing. Taking a spoonful, she cautiously sipped the hot soup. She let out a pleased hum in her throat. “Delicious!” she said cheerfully.

“You sound surprised,” Aliana jested. “Has my cooking not been up to snuff since you arrived?”

“Oh no no no!” Rey insisted. “It’s always good! I was just surprised by... oh, you’re just teasing me.”

“Guilty as charged,” Aliana smirked as she took a sip and giggled.

Rey reached over and smacked her shoulder, “You know I’m new at this!”

“And that’s so exploitable,” Aliana snickered.

Rey rolled her eyes and took another spoonful of soup to hide her smile. Even in her indignance, the banter between them was always enjoyable. Taking a moment to savor the soup, she considered her response.

“Perhaps I should bring you back to Jakku with me,” she said playfully. “Can’t imagine going back to simple portions after this.”

“You could always stay on the ship,” Aliana chuckled, “I could use the company in freelancing.”

It took her a minute, but eventually the ramifications of what she’d just said registered in what was increasingly starting to feel like the single solitary brain cell in her skull. Those implications were not lost on Rey either, who’d frozen mid-sip.

For a moment all that could be heard was the sound of 2V sweeping the deck.

“Is that what you want?” Rey asked, placing her spoon back into her bowl. “Do you want me to stay?”

“Uh... I mean... if the idea was... interesting to you I guess?” Aliana shrugged nervously, “I mean you are good company and you like the ship and... there would be things to work out first but I mean... if it was something you wanted to do?”

Rey’s mind buzzed with the thought. True, everything about that idea seemed appealing, but... she had just got done debating with herself between joining the Resistance or going back to Jakku. Now this opportunity presents itself?

“I... I’ll have to think about that.” Rey said plainly before taking another sip of her breakfast. “It seems a lot of new prospects have been opening up for me these days.”

“Well... the offer is always there if you’re looking for work or something...” Aliana focused on her bowl, her face warm as she tried to control her rampaging emotions.

Rey’s brow furrowed as she thought about the idea. Was this Aliana’s motive? To get Rey to stay with her? But then why did it seem like there were times that Aliana would rather she wasn’t around. “Are you sure you’d want me around that long?” Rey asked. “I feel like you’d want your privacy back eventually.”

“I guess? Not really? Maybe?” Aliana stared down at her food, internally panicking. She didn’t know how to recover from blunders like these and resolved to just control her sputtering.

“Are you alright?”

“Uh...” Aliana didn’t answer as she took another sip of her soup, busying herself with eating to avoid answering questions.

Rey frowned. It was clear to her that Aliana was not telling her something. The thought of her keeping secrets from Rey didn’t sit kindly. Still, if it was indeed too personal for Aliana to tell someone that, honestly, she’s only known for a few days, then perhaps Rey was wrong for trying to press the matter.

“Are you okay?” she asked, “You seem... distracted.”

“Uh... yeah? I’m just...” Aliana tried to find a way to explain herself without getting too specific, “I’m always like this around girls.”

Rey tilted her head slightly. “Really? How come?” she asked with confusion.

Now it was Aliana’s turn to be confused. She was accustomed to the answer being obvious to most people. In fact, this was the first time in years she’d been in a situation where she would have had to explain herself any further, “...Because I’m gay.”

Rey’s confusion only intensified. “You look more nervous than happy to me.”

Aliana sputtered and had to exert a great deal of self-control to keep from laughing. Rey really didn’t know? Was it just the term or the concept at large? She was about to find out.

“No, Rey. It means I like women,” Aliana explained, “Like the way men do.”

Rey’s expression of confusion was swapped with one of clarity and surprise. “Wait, you can do that!?” she asked, bewildered. “I... I had no idea that was a thing. Wait, you aren’t teasing me again, are you?” she asked, skepticism etching her face slightly.

“Uh, no! No teasing here,” Aliana shook her head, “I like women. And being around them makes me a little nervous and... flustered.”

A part of Rey wanted to sigh in relief upon this realization. Such a revelation had to be whatever it was that Aliana was hiding and having it out in the open felt like a weight being lifted from her shoulders. However, a much larger part of Rey was more focused on the gravity of the revelation in the first place. She absolutely had no idea a woman could be attracted to other women in that way. She saw nothing like that on Jakku. Granted she’d rarely seen romance bloom between the scavengers on Jakku, but the few times she had seen it, it was always the opposite.

Rey was silent for a moment, a look of amazement plastered on her face. Aliana couldn't help but smirk at how flabbergasted she looked. "Did I just shatter your entire worldview a little bit?" she asked cheekily.

"...I mean a little," Rey replied sheepishly.

Aliana wanted to laugh, but she also sympathized with Rey's ignorance. Jakku was an Outer Rim world controlled by the Hutt Cartels, and they were far less forgiving toward people like Aliana than the Republic. Still better than the First Order and Imperial Space, where she would have been executed or "conditioned" if discovered.

"Well it's less common in the Outer Rim, but yeah. In the Core Worlds you'll see women and men like me all over the place," Aliana smiled.

"Wow, that would be a sight wouldn't it?" Rey asked. "I guess it's a shame that you avoid the Core worlds. Someone like you seems like they'd have no problem finding a girl."

Rey paused, somewhat surprised by her own words. Where did that come from? This was the third time she'd said something like this to Aliana and she still couldn't pinpoint a reason why.

"Actually, no," Aliana shook her head, "Even if I did feel safe going into the Core worlds, my eyes usually scare people off anyway." She leaned forward to show Rey her irises.

Rey leaned in slightly to get a better look. Sure enough, she could see that Aliana's eyes were crimson red. They looked hot and fierce like a blaster bolt, and something told her that Aliana could be just as deadly if she wanted to be. Still when she looked into those eyes, she did not feel fear or concern of any kind. Perhaps because she knew those fierce eyes belonged to someone kind and gentle.

"Well that's hardly fair," Rey said before pulling away. "People shouldn't be so easily scared off considering how little they know. You can't judge a freighter by its hull after all."

"I guess after the Galactic Civil War, people are jumpy about anything that might remind them of the Sith," Aliana said as she finished her soup, "Sith and Dark Jedi can develop red or yellow eyes if they're evil enough, and so people just jump to that conclusion."

Rey frowned and looked downward slightly. "I see," she said solemnly. "I suppose fear is a powerful tool after all... considering how deeply it seems to affect the galaxy."

"I don't blame them, honestly," Aliana shrugged, "I'm not the only person with red eyes to get this kind of treatment, but considering the things the Empire had done and the First Order continues to do... well there's a reason you don't see any kids named Anakin anymore."

Rey couldn't suppress a giggle at Aliana's words despite the rather serious subject matter. "Yeah... I can't imagine the name Palpatine is very popular either."

"Oh, but do you know what Palpatine's first name was?" Aliana asked, a mischievous look on her face.

Rey arched a brow. "What?"

"Sheev," Aliana answered.

Rey nearly choked on her own laughter.

“I KNOW!”

Chapter End Notes

If you enjoyed this chapter, leave a comment explaining why. Free content thrives on interaction and feedback.

Screaming Like A Stuck Mynock

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“General Organa?”

Leia turned around and smiled at her long time friend, “You have something for me, Amilyn?”

It had been several days since Poe had gone dark, and the mission to retrieve the last piece of the map had been classified as a failure. Strangely, the First Order had met total defeat on Jakku as an entire platoon of stormtroopers and starfighters had been completely obliterated. It seemed that Snoke had not yet managed to secure the map either, meaning it was still out there somewhere. Leia had been holding out hope for any scrap of news since then.

“Yes, but it’s odd,” Amilyn winced, “Poe Dameron was dropped off at a safehouse. He was in an induced coma and recovering from several injuries.”

Leia’s eyebrow rose as she leaned closer to Amilyn, her attention fully on the other woman. “What happened? Did he have the map with him?”

Amilyn shook her head, “He’s still not awake, and the map wasn’t on him. What’s strange is the woman who dropped him off.”

“What about her?” Leia asked. None of their forces reported locating or rescuing Poe from the compromised mission. As such, she could only assume he was rescued by a friendly third party.

“She was a Sith Lord,” Amilyn explained, “And one who has been making rounds in the Outer Rim before. The only name I could pull up was Darth Amorosa.”

Leia’s eyes widened as her blood ran cold. The Sith Lord was back? They had indeed encountered her in the Outer Rim and pursued her for a solid month before they lost her. The failure to catch the Sith or provide evidence of her existence lost the Resistance a fair amount of support from the Republic. Leia considered that Sith the first major failure of the Resistance’s existence.

“Amorosa,” Leia said with a groan. “I knew that Sith would come back... but why would she bring Poe back to us?”

“I don’t know,” Amilyn shook her head, “But Paige mentioned in her report that she did surrender her lightsaber while on the station, and retrieved it when she left, and they had no complaints about the Sith while she was there. She was also accompanied by a girl who we think might be her apprentice.”

Leia’s frown deepened. Having a Sith involved in one of their most critical missions was bad enough, but now they couldn’t be sure where exactly she stood. The General knew that they couldn’t trust Amorosa no matter what, but whatever game she was playing seemed to be working in their favor. For the moment at least. Perhaps they could benefit from the Sith’s involvement so long as they shot first before the inevitable betrayal.

“She was flying the same ship as before, yes? Did you get her comm channel?” Leia asked.

“Yes, but not entirely willingly,” Amilyn remarked, “Paige had slicers get every identifier for the ship possible. If you wanted to contact her, we can get a clear signal in.”

Leia gave it a moment of thought. It was highly likely that the Sith was expecting them to hail her immediately. She did not like the idea of playing into her hands. “Let’s wait for Poe to come to. See if he can tell us anything about the Sith before we contact her. I want to make sure she’s not the reason he’s in that coma.”

“I’ll get someone to monitor his revival. We should be able to get something from him within an hour,” Amilyn nodded.

“Good,” Leia said, turning back to the displays on her holoterminal. She didn’t like this one bit. Her son was bad enough, but a renegade Sith? If there was ever a time she needed Luke, now was certainly it.

“My Lord,” Hux announced as he entered Kylo Ren’s chambers, “I have good news.”

Kylo turned ever so slightly to acknowledge the General. “Speak, then.”

“We’ve tracked the Sith to a planet-less star a few dozen light years out from Jakku,” Hux explained, “Long-range sensors show that she has stopped to collect fuel from the star and has been hovering for several hours. We don’t currently know if an intercept is possible, as the ship’s fuel capacity is not yet known to us. But for the time being we have her on our sensors. And she appears to have a passenger.”

Kylo’s brain wracked with the information. If the scanners picked up another lifeform reading then...

“The traitor is with them,” Kylo deduced, now facing Hux completely. “They have the droid on that ship. Keep them under surveillance and let me know the moment they make a move.”

Hux hesitated and looked away from Kylo Ren, “Actually my Lord, the only droid scanners can detect on the ship is a protocol droid just as ancient as the ship itself. And the passenger is a human female seen fleeing Jakku with the traitor.”

Just as Ren’s thought process was picking up steam, it stopped dead in its tracks. Another human involved? A female? “Why was this female not included in the captain's report?” Ren asked, barely containing the anger in his voice.

“The Captain felt it inconsequential,” Hux said, displeasure laced his voice as well, “He has been reprimanded. The droid escaped Jakku with the traitor and human in one ship, and the Sith in another. At some point the human swapped ships, and the other ship has yet to be recovered.”

Ren clenched his fist as he began to seethe. He knew the Sith was involved in all of this. Why distance herself from the droid when she must have known how important it was? Why take this other woman into her own ship? Was she trying to cut her losses and run away? No, that couldn’t be. What was the Sith planning?

His gloves hid the white in his knuckles from how hard he was clenching his fist. After a moment of frustrated speculation, he came to an epiphany. “She has taken this female as her apprentice,” he

said aloud. “She’s distanced herself from the droid in the hopes that we would follow it and allow them to train in peace.”

“My Lord?” Hux asked, looking confused.

Ren turned around and faced the general, which turned out to be a pretty useless gesture overall since his face was still covered by his mask, “Abandon the droid and the traitor, and track the Sith.”

“My Lord, the Supreme Leader-”

“The Supreme Leader wanted the map to destroy Skywalker and prevent the Jedi from returning,” Ren snapped at him, “The Sith are an equal, if not greater priority. A Jedi has a code of ethics that makes them easy to manipulate and work around. A Sith has no such restraint. Track them and do not let them out of your sight!”

Hux bit back any words of protest he might have had, straightening his posture slightly. “... Yes my Lord,” he said almost curtly.

As the door closed behind him, Ren turned back to the helmet. Only seventy-two hours ago they were under the impression that the Sith were extinct and the Jedi on the brink. Now not only had the Sith proven to still be active, but one girl had managed to completely upend the First Order’s mission and present an even more dangerous threat.

As much as he wanted to believe in his own strength, there was no avoiding the truth: If the Resistance had somehow recruited both the Jedi and the Sith, nothing would stop them.

“Kid, I need you up here,” Han called out from the pilot’s seat of the Falcon. They’d been in Hyperspace for two days and had been taking it in shifts to keep the ship on course. Chewie had slumped off to the bunks to get some rest, leaving Han to fly alone for several hours while Finn and BB-8 worked on repairs to the ship. The Falcon had spent too long rusting in the desert and the constant sandstorms of Jakku had done a lot of damage to the internal systems.

The Falcon could still fly, but would need more intensive maintenance soon if he and Chewie wanted to keep it.

Finn looked up from the under the floor as he heard Han calling up for him and briskly made his way to the cockpit. On the way there, he had a brief moment to consider just how insane his situation had become. He knew that life outside the First Order wouldn’t be easy as he was branded a traitor for life. Still, he had operated under the belief that he would simply have to keep moving and keep his head down wherever he went. He didn’t think he’d jump ship straight into the Resistance.

The past two days had him considering what his options could be once they landed on Takodana. Would he be able to board a shuttle to nowhere and disappear discreetly? Time would tell.

He didn’t have long to continue pondering on it before he reached the cockpit.

“What do you need?” he asked, sitting down in the co-pilot’s seat.

“Take control of the helm and keep the ship on course while I try to get the shield generator back online,” Han said as he turned his attention toward a control panel on his left.

Finn took the controls and made the necessary course corrections. It was mundane enough to allow his mind to continue to wander. He'd originally thought about fleeing to the Outer Rim, but the closer he got to anything affiliated with the Resistance the less likely that would be.

A part of him wondered if Rey would think any less of him for wishing to flee. The thought caused a knot to twist in his stomach. They didn't know each other for very long but... a part of him didn't want to let her down. He shook his head of those thoughts. After what happened with Poe, his defection caused enough problems for everyone. The sooner he disappeared, the better off everyone would be.

"So tell me kid, are either of you gonna come clean to your friend?" Han asked as he tried in vain to fix the shield generator.

Finn snapped out of his inner thoughts to look at Han. "... What do you mean?" Finn asked, praying he didn't hear him right.

"C'mon, kid. I fought the Empire, I know the walk of a Stormtrooper when I see one," Han shook his head, "Are you and Aliana ever going to come clean to the girl about who you both really are?"

Finn slumped in the pilot seat as Han spoke. He considered what his answer would be before another question took the forefront of his attention. "Wait, Aliana? What secret is she keeping?"

"Oh kid, you really are dense aren't ya?" Han whistled, "The lightsaber and the spooky eyes? She's a Sith Lord."

Finn's eyes widened. "A what!?" Finn said, shooting straight up from his chair. "A-A Sith!? We left Rey alone with a Sith!?"

Han gave him a deadpan glare.

"...OK, I shouldn't really talk," Finn conceded sinking back into his chair. "... I... I don't know why I didn't see it. It was staring me right in the face!"

"Yeah, that girl is a terrible liar," Han huffed, pulling on another lever and smiling as the shield generator came online, "Even if she hadn't gone full Sith when we boarded, it would have been obvious to anyone."

Finn's brow furrowed as the thought continued to wrack in his brain. "But... we can trust her? I mean... she's been pretty helpful since I met her and she's clearly not with the First Order. What's her deal?"

"Probably the same as yours and everyone else's," Han said as he returned his focus to the pilot's controls, "Just trying to survive in a galaxy at war. I don't know her whole story, but whatever it is had something in it that made her uninterested in joining the First Order. And according to rumors flying around the comm channel, she wiped out an entire platoon of Stormtroopers on Jakku."

Finn sucked air through his teeth. If he didn't make the call he made when he made it, he might have been on the receiving end of Aliana's wrath. Suddenly any reservations he had about his defection had all but vanished. "I'll... have to ask her about all this when we touch down."

"Well whatever you do, don't tell the girl," Han said, "The Sith has a thing for her, and that's something she needs to tell her herself."

“Wait she does?” Finn asked incredulously.

If Finn understood droidspeak, he would have heard BB-8 say something along the lines of ‘Of course she does! Even I noticed that!’.

“Yeah, said as much herself,” Han nodded, “I can see why she wouldn’t want to tell the girl right away, so it’s probably best you let her decide when to do that.”

Finn slumped down in the pilot seat. “Well alright, but if she’s going to hold back on her secret, so can I,” he said almost defensively.

Han couldn’t help but laugh, “Kid, it’s not a competition. And even if it were, let me tell you something. You don’t want to be the last person to give someone honesty. Ever.”

Finn sighed and nodded. “... Yeah, you’re probably right.” Han seemed to be as wise as he was grumpy, which was to say very. Finn knew he at least owed Rey the truth before he disappeared. He just hoped the last memory he had of her wasn’t one of disgust or betrayal.

Then something else clicked in his head.

“Wait, Aliana has a thing for Rey?” Finn asked, looking confused, “But she’s a woman.”

Han shook his head at Finn. “Did they just keep you locked in a room for most of your life?” he asked.

“... More or less,” answered Finn.

“Yes Aliana has a thing for Rey. It’s called being gay.”

“Huh...” Finn said, staring down at the controls, before shrugging, “Guess I have a lot more galaxy to explore than I thought.”

“I’m older than I thought I’d live to be and I’m still finding new things,” Han said, a slight smile on his face.

“Miss Beniko, I’m terribly sorry to interrupt but there is an incoming transmission to your personal holoterminal,” 2V said as he entered the cargo hold.

Aliana looked up from the accelerator conduit she was trying to piece together, looking confused, “How did someone get my personal holochannel?”

“I’m sorry, Miss Beniko, but I do not have that information in my databanks,” 2V said, hanging his head in shame.

“Uh... how’s this?” she asked, turning to Rey and holding up the accelerator conduit.

Rey narrowed her eyes at the conduit looking at it carefully. “... Better than before, but wiring still needs to be closer together. They look like they’re about to bust out of the shell.”

Aliana winced as she set the conduit down and stood up, “I’ll give it another shot when I get back. 2V, reroute the call to my quarters and erect privacy fields.”

“At once, Master!”

Once she was safely in her quarters and she was certain she wouldn't be heard, she activated the holoterminal, “This is Darth Amorosa of the Sith Warship Fury.”

The image of Leia appeared atop the holoterminal. “Hello, Darth Amorosa. This is General Leia Organa of the Resistance.”

“To what do I owe the pleasure, General?” Aliana asked, tilting her head, “And how did you get the frequencies for my personal holochannel?”

“Our people are very resourceful, although it might have something to do with how you docked at one of our safe houses to return a Resistance fighter to us. A pilot by the name of Poe Dameron. I want to know what prompted you to do this for us.”

“It was en-route,” Aliana said matter-of-factly, “I was on Jakku when Dameron crashed into the dune and he was recovering in my medbay when the First Order attacked the planet. Frankly a lot happened on Jakku within just a few days.”

“And why exactly did you decide to help one of ours rather than the First Order?” Leia asked. “As best as any of us can figure, you two would be perfect for each other.”

Aliana cocked an eyebrow, “The First Order would try to kill me if I tried to join up with them,” she explained, “I'm a Sith, I have alien ancestry, and I'm gay. Not exactly a winning combination for them. Especially not with that lunatic Jedi running the place.”

“Wasn't asking for your life story,” Leia said, disregarding the last part of Aliana's reply. “The pilot was sent on a critical mission to gather important data. If you have any knowledge on this mission or the data that you didn't share with Tico at the safehouse, I would ask that you give it to me.”

“You mean the map? I don't have it,” Aliana explained, “The map is in a droid named BB-8 and he's on a Corellian YT-Model freighter with two humans and a Wookiee. We split up to make it harder for the First Order to track us while we take separate routes to our destination. And I can't disclose that destination over a ship's holocom. But rest assured, General. Bringing the map to you is my number one priority.”

Leia sighed and shook her head. “A YT and a wookiee, eh? I take it you've somehow managed to rope Han Solo and Chewbacca into this?”

“Their ship was on Jakku and it was taken in the escape. Solo tracked it down and boarded it,” Aliana explained, “I didn't rope anyone, it was circumstance.”

Leia was quiet for a moment. “Very well. So you two are to rendezvous to a location that you cannot disclose over comms. What's your next step when you arrive so that the Resistance can reach you?

“BB-8 has already disclosed the coordinates to D'Qar. The Fury and the Falcon are both hot, so we're going to put him, a renegade stormtrooper and a scavenger from Jakku onto a ship that isn't on their radar and send them to you. Assuming everything goes off without a hitch, BB-8 should be in your hands within a few weeks,” Aliana said, her hand absently fiddling with her lightsaber. She didn't like being on holocalls with generals. Especially Jedi.

There was a slight narrowing in Leia's eyes as she retained eye contact through the holo. As Aliana's gaze did not waver, she nodded. "Very well. What are you and your apprentice going to do in the meantime?" she asked.

"My apprentice?" Aliana asked, looking confused, "I have no apprentice."

"The woman that accompanied you to the safehouse," Leia clarified. "Traveling in two is the general MO for the Sith."

"She isn't my apprentice, though she is strong in the Force," Aliana explained, "She's the scavenger I mentioned. In fact, both her and the stormtrooper are strong in the Force. In the meantime we're going to lay low until we can find a ship that isn't being tracked. I believe I may be the reason your mission has gotten so much more complicated, General."

"That sounds about right," Leia agreed. "If there's one thing Sith are good at, it's making things worse. You especially have a talent for being slippery." Leia's posture then began to relax somewhat. "Alright then, we'll keep our scanners on looking for the Falcon. And... I suppose I should thank you for bringing Poe back to us alive and mostly intact. He's one of our best pilots."

Aliana bowed her head slightly, "It was no trouble at all, General. And I'll have your droid to you within the coming weeks. May the Force serve you well."

Leia caught the Sith twist on the farewell and had to resist the urge to frown before the communication cut off. In her quarters, she leaned against the holoterminal sighed. "I have a bad feeling about this."

Aliana left her quarters with a bad taste in her mouth and a headache. Talking to Jedi was always an exercise in patience as everything they said always carried this undercurrent of condescension. As much as she understood why the average person would be distrustful of her, that understanding did not extend to Jedi. Clearly Leia was more devious than she looked, as even with the channel cut her head wouldn't stop throbbing.

Wait... that wasn't the Jedi. At least, it wasn't that particular Jedi...

"2V! Roll the ship now!" she screamed as she came tearing into the cockpit.

2V obeyed Aliana's command without hesitation and turned the controls hard, causing the Fury to spin on the starboard side and narrowly avoid a wave of turbo lasers that were fired at them.

"Oh that was close!" 2V exclaimed. "Excellent call, Master. Spinning is always a good trick."

Aliana's instincts had been right. A Star Destroyer had pulled in out of Hyperspace and began firing a full barrage the moment they spotted the Fury. Glancing at the fuel display, the Fury had enough for half the journey to Takodana.

"Rey, can you get us close to the Destroyer? If we don't take out those guns we're sitting ducks!" Aliana said, sitting in the Captain's chair.

"Not a problem!" Rey said, taking the pilot seat on Aliana's right. At the controls, she quickly spun the ship around and moved towards the Destroyer, spinning and swerving past the hail of fire that was being shot at them. Were the situation not so tense, Rey would be surprised at how precise her evasive maneuvers were. 2V opened fire on the turbolasers as Rey passed them, making precise

shots on every turret. Aliana had never fully appreciated having a droid for a co-pilot, but now in the face of a First Order cruiser she was certainly grateful for 2V's processing speed. For an impromptu attack, things were going pretty well.

And then they went not so well.

An ion shot from a cannon struck the Fury's main engine and brought the ship into a drift. The Destroyer stopped firing once the Fury was disabled, and Aliana could see a small shuttlecraft leave the Destroyer's hangar bay. This wasn't good.

"Rey, how fast can you get the thrusters back online?" Aliana asked.

Rey frantically began tinkering with the controls. "I... I can't guarantee I can do it before they can board us, but I'll try." She stood up from the pilot's seat and ran as fast as she could to the engine room. "2V stay on the controls please!"

"Of course, Miss Rey." 2V answered almost too cheerfully. "Please do your best to keep us from being destroyed."

The shuttle passed overhead and docked with the ship. Taking a deep breath, Aliana got up and positioned herself to see the intruders. Or rather, intruder. She groaned when she saw the docking port open and Kylo Ren stepped onto her ship. Aliana sneered at him in disgust. The stench of greasy Jedi would take months to get out now.

"I told you to keep away from my ship," Aliana growled.

"It's your fault for getting involved in our affairs," Kylo responded, the filter in his mask causing an echo throughout the ship. "You thought we would take the bait and leave you here to scheme your next move in peace, but I knew you were too dangerous to leave unchecked."

Aliana glanced toward the engine room, a very difficult decision before her. It would be easier to dispatch Kylo Ren with her lightsaber, but that would blow her cover to Rey. She'd been hoping to enjoy the few weeks on Takodana with both Rey and Finn before going back to her life alone in the Outer Rim, but now this Jedi had made those plans a lot more difficult to maintain.

"And yet you came here anyway," Aliana narrowed her eyes at him, "Quite foolish of you, Jedi. The last time I saw you, you fled with your tail between your legs."

"You were foolish enough to let me live, knowing I would return stronger," Kylo countered pacing around Aliana. "And now you appear to have an apprentice aboard this ship. I wonder how she would feel about helping me kill her master and joining our cause."

Rey meanwhile was frantically working over the engine. She could hear Aliana speaking to whoever boarded them though she couldn't quite hear them over hectically removing and replacing pieces that were damaged by the ion surge. Luckily, Aliana was smart enough to keep spare power conduits close to the engine. On the flight deck, Aliana herself was livid.

"You lay a single hand on her and I'll make sure you die screaming like a stuck mynock," she growled, her hands clenched tightly beside her and her eyes burning.

The visceral rage and protectiveness radiating from Aliana did not escape Ren's notice. Aliana's power was only fueled by her passions, and her feelings for the scavenger were extremely strong.

Any thoughts about recruiting the Sith died with this revelation. Now he was determined to kill her.

“So, you are infatuated with the girl?” Kylo Ren sneered, “Now killing you almost seems like a mercy.”

That did it. Aliana threw her hand out and blasted Kylo Ren with lightning, who fumbled with his lightsaber to get the blade in the way to protect himself. Upon realizing he had his guard up, Aliana cut off her attack and cracked her knuckles.

“Well come on then. I’ll enjoy beating you into the dirt again!” she sneered.

Kylo wasn’t sure why Aliana didn’t draw her lightsaber again, though he imagined it was just to mock him. Not wanting to waste the advantage, he lunged at her. His blade swung with the power of his festering hate and anger channeling through him. Aliana ducked down under his swing, and on her return to full height rammed her elbow into Kylo’s unprotected ribs, sending him off balance again.

“Still slow as ever, eh Jedi?” she taunted.

Ren bit back a growl and then began punching himself in the sore spot that Aliana just drove her elbow into. He used the pain to fuel his anger before turning to attack again. Despite his best efforts, all his blade was hitting was the durasteel of the surrounding walls. Aliana was effortlessly weaving around his lightsaber and getting a hit to a different pressure point each time.

Two things happened on Ren’s next feeble attempt at a strike.

Aliana caught his wrist and wrenched it to point his lightsaber away from her, and then stepped close and wrapped her fingers around his throat.

And then Rey came out to see if she was alright. The screech of Kylo’s lightsaber tearing into the walls and floor had gotten her worried, and she came out to see Aliana strangling the Dark Jedi and holding his saber arm in a useless position.



“Uhhh...” Was all Rey could say.

Ren, desperately gasping for air and trembling with panic, turns his head to see the other woman standing just outside the corridor. Reaching out with the hand that was fruitlessly trying to extract Aliana’s iron grip on his throat, he uses the force to send Rey flying through the air, hitting the metal wall on the far end of the corridor hard.

Aliana turned her head back in horror as she watched Rey crumple to the ground in a heap, “Rey!” she screamed as she slammed Kylo Ren’s head into the wall and pried his lightsaber from his hand before running to her side, “Rey? Can you hear me?!”

Ren’s helmet was perhaps the only thing that kept Aliana from cracking his skull on the wall. His vision was speckled with dots and his legs refused to hold his weight. With somehow less dignity than his previous defeat, he scrambled to the airlock as fast as he could to his shuttle.

Aliana glanced back, wanting to chase him down and end his miserable life. But Rey won out and she set Ren’s lightsaber down as she gingerly picked her up and laid Rey’s head in her lap, “Rey? Please say something...” she whispered as her fingers ran over the back of Rey’s head. There was some bruising, and a minor fracture. She only hoped everything inside her skull was unhurt.

“Ngghh..” Rey groaned. Her eyes fluttered open to see two of Aliana and not much else through her blurry vision. “Hey, Alie. Did you get the ID of that invisible speeder that hit me?”

Aliana breathed one of the biggest sighs of relief she could and gently lifted Rey into her arms, carrying her to the medbay, “No, but the Dark Jedi is gone for now.”

Rey let out a small chuckle before wincing in pain.

2V poked his head into the medbay. “Master? The engine is back online. Should we commence with a hasty retreat? I worry the Destroyer will send fighters at us once the shuttle is out of range.”

“Hold on,” Aliana said as she laid Rey down onto the bed. Making sure she would be okay, she returned to the cockpit to see Ren’s shuttle speeding away.

She sat down in the captain’s chair and closed her eyes, reaching out with the Force. She could sense him in the shuttle, humiliated and dazed from the fight. Scared at how easily she had overtaken him without even drawing her lightsaber. Aliana fed on that fear. It was satisfying to know that this floundering Dark Jedi was afraid of her.

‘Mark my words, Jedi. The next time I see you, I’ll kill you for that. I’m coming for you.’

Ren said nothing to the telepathic signal that Aliana put out, but she could tell the terror he was feeling had all but doubled from hearing it. The shuttle pulled away from the Fury and began flying off at top speed. Kylo Ren had made a grave mistake today.

He’d gotten on the bad side of the Dark Lady of the Sith.

Chapter End Notes

If you enjoyed this chapter, leave a comment explaining why. Free content thrives on interaction and feedback.

Her Apprentice Will Be Mine

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Rey was astounded as Aliana pulled the ship down toward Maz's castle. Takodana was such a bright, green, vibrant world. The likes of which she had never seen in her life. All she'd known was the harsh, barren landscape of Jakku. To see this planet teeming with life, so colorful and beautiful, felt like waking up for the first time.

"You alright?" Aliana asked, glancing at her, "You look like you're spacing out."

Rey was snapped out of her stupor and turned to look sheepishly at Aliana. "Sorry! It's just.... I never knew there was this much green in the entire galaxy," she said, an air of whimsy in her voice.

Aliana felt a fond smile spread on her face. Every day it became clearer what she had been taking for granted in her life of travels compared to the life of a marooned scavenger. "If you think this is a lot of green, maybe we should take a trip over to Kashyyyk."

"Are there forests there?"

"The whole planet is covered in thick forests the way Jakku is covered in sand," Aliana explained as she gingerly brought the Fury down in a clearing a kilometer away from the castle.

Rey's eyes nearly bugged out of her skull at the thought of a forest that large and that thick. Aliana couldn't help but be taken with how adorable the sight was. "I'd be more than happy to take you out to explore these forests if you'd like... right after we deal with the map of course."

Rey shook her head slightly as if to rid herself of the wonderful thoughts and put on a look of professionalism. "Yes, of course. After you, Miss Beniko," she said with a smirk teasing the end of her lips.

Aliana smiled and led Rey down the ramp and out onto the planet's surface. If the forests were amazing from above, being at their edge with a river in front of her was practically overwhelming. The sound of the river flowing over the rocks, the rich smell of the pine trees, it all hit Rey at full force and she was at risk of falling to her knees and crying. It was all so new and so intense that she could have sworn it was giving her a headache. She took a deep breath, the air feeling so crisp and clean that she could have sworn she would start coughing out years of Jakku dust.

Aliana kept her eyes on Rey as they descended down the ramp. Seeing how Rey reacted to the feeling of stepping on a completely different planet was just as captivating as the planet itself. Seeing Rey be so happy caused a warm feeling to flourish in Aliana's chest. She loved seeing her this happy. Part of her wanted to keep making Rey this happy and keep taking her to other worlds. A pang of disappointment shot through her at the thought. As much as she wanted it, Aliana knew that Rey staying with her was highly unlikely, especially whenever she found out the truth.

It was common belief that the Sith did not make good company.

Her smile fell and she was quiet as they walked to the castle, only the crunch of her boots against the gravel and Rey's occasional happy sounds disturbing the sound of the leaves and the birds. As

they got closer to the castle, the front gate opened and two familiar faces came out to meet them.

“Took you long enough,” Han nodded, “We’ve been here for four hours waiting for you.”

“We got intercepted,” Aliana said, only half paying attention.

“By what?” Finn asked.

“A First Order dreadnought,” she clarified.

Han’s brow lifted high. “And you two got away? Not bad.”

“Well, Alie did most of the work,” Rey said modestly.

“Psh, far from it,” Aliana said with an easy smile. “I certainly couldn’t have gotten that engine back online like you did.”

Rey felt a flush of pink spread on her cheeks. “Well... I mean...”

Aliana’s face perked up when she remembered what Kylo Ren had said on the Fury, “Oh right! The First Order isn’t tailing the Falcon right now, Kylo Ren thinks I was using the ship as a red herring. It’s still on their radar, but they’re not interested in it.”

“Well, thanks for being the bait then,” Han said with a smirk. “C’m on. Maz is inside.”

Han and Finn turned to walk back into the large castle, Aliana and Rey following after them. Rey’s eyes never stayed in one place for very long. The path to the castle’s entrance was adorned with as many flags as different kinds of species she currently saw. “What exactly is this place again, Alie?” Rey asked.

“Safe haven for criminals,” Aliana answered, placing a shoulder as an air of uncertainty fell over Rey. “Don’t worry. No one will bother us here. Criminals behave themselves when they congregate with each other. It’s why Hutt Space can be a safe place to hide.”

As they stepped inside to the large cantina, Rey was overtaken by the noise of everyone going about their own business. People taking, shouting, yelling for drinks, chanting in languages she couldn’t even recognize.

“Stay focused,” Aliana said, laying a hand on her shoulder, “It’s safe, but people don’t like to be stared at.”

Rey looked at Aliana, the sight of her crimson eyes and feeling of her hand on her shoulder was surprisingly soothing. She took a deep breath and nodded. “Alright,” she said.

She couldn’t help but notice that Aliana seemed to have less energy than before. Her smile was strained and she seemed to be looking past Rey rather than directly at her. Feeling concerned, she asked, “Are you alright? You seem down?”

“Uh... yeah? Maybe?” Aliana shrugged, “I’ve kinda got my mind on something...”

“... Do you need to talk about it?” Rey offered.

Aliana's smile became gentler and her eyes slightly less troubled. "We can worry about it after we settle our business here. Perhaps that walk I suggested will help clear my head."

"... Well, alright. So long as you're sure," Rey said, not entirely satisfied with the answer, but not wanting to press it.

"Thanks," Aliana nodded as she led Rey to sit down with Han and Finn alongside a very small alien woman who Rey inferred to be Maz.

"Han Solo and Aliana Beniko?" Maz said, looking surprised, "An odd combination to say the least. What brings you to my corner of space?"

"These two," Han said, pointing to Rey and Finn, and then to BB-8, "Along with the droid. They need to get on a transport to the Resistance and I need to get out of here with my ship."

"And what about you?" Maz asked, looking at Aliana.

"I'm the one who found them, and the Falcon," Aliana said, looking down at the table.

Maz sat back in her seat, an intrigued look on her aged face. "And you chose to get involved? Rather curious behavior for one such a—"

"They have information that could be crucial for bringing down the First Order," Aliana interrupted. "That's something we all want. Regardless of background."

Maz was silent for a moment before nodding. "Yes, the map. Han has showed me. This is information that we cannot risk letting fall into their hands."

"What we need is a clean ship to send off to D'Qar," Aliana explained, "I'd take them in the Fury, but it and the Falcon are being watched. If we lead the First Order to the Resistance, we may as well just stab ourselves with this," she set Kylo Ren's lightsaber on the table as if to finalize how stupid such a mistake would be.

Han eyed the hilt on the table. "... Is that?"

"Kylo Ren's lightsaber," Aliana confirmed. "I took it from his person. The man was pathetic."

Finn's eyes widened in surprise at the dismissive tone she had. Despite already knowing Aliana was Sith but the idea that she took down Kylo Ren with ease caused a sliver of fear to shoot through him.

"A clean ship will be easy to provide," Maz replied. "... Just not right away."

"What does that mean?" Aliana asked, her tone less than thrilled.

"You need a clean ship, but you also need a pilot who's willing to risk crossing the First Order," Max explained, "And a pilot who can be trusted with the location of the Resistance base. That's a lot of variables to consider, especially given that for the right price you can convince a man to sell out his best friend."

Chewie let out a throaty huff in agreement.

"You'll all be more than welcome to stay here in the interim," Maz said.

Rey's mouth turned to a thin line. "Will... will I be able to get a shuttle back home sooner?"

"That's two clean ships you are asking me for, which only complicates things," Maz said apologetically.

Rey's expression was unreadable for a second before she nodded. "I figured. No worries. We'll be fine here," she said, smiling at Aliana.

Aliana smiled back. Then there was the sound of a throat clearing and they both turned their attention to Finn.

"We can't stay here," Finn said, looking worried, "We need to get away from the First Order. If we stay in one place too long, they will find us and they *will* kill us!"

"Finn, we've already had an encounter with the First Order on Jakku and it ended disastrously for them," Aliana rolled her eyes, "I've had two encounters with Kylo Ren already and he's fled like a wounded kash hound both times."

"When did you fight him the first time?" Han asked.

"Jakku," Aliana replied with a smirk. "He was equally unimpressive both times."

"She took him down bare handed on the ship," Rey remarked. "It was outstanding."

"Oh, stop," Aliana said, smiling a little.

"No, really." Rey insisted. "My jaw was on the floor seeing how effortlessly you took care of him."

"You mean before he sent you into the wall?" Aliana teased.

Rey winced, remembering how much pain she'd been in when Ren had thrown her with the Force.

"I'd have strangled that rat to death if it weren't for that," Aliana shook her head, "Next time, though. Next time he's a dead man."

Han glanced at Aliana, frowning.

"How did you do that?" Finn asked, tilting his head. He knew the answer, but the fact that she took him down without a lightsaber was a detail that gave him pause, "How'd you disarm and almost kill him without a weapon?"

"My mother taught me all kinds of ways to fight. Blasters, vibroblades, and a little Echani training," Aliana shrugged, "Doesn't help that Ren has such a sloppy form and is obsessed with power swings, which is just ridiculous. A lightsaber has no weight to it, and you just need to touch something to cut it. But he swings that thing like it's made of duracrete."

Han silently grumbled to himself but said nothing.

"Such is the nature of the First Order," Maz said casually. "Desperately clinging to the coattails of the Empire's 'Glory Days'. Reckless and ignorant, but no less dangerous."

Aliana picked up Kylo Ren's lightsaber and examined it, "I gotta strip this thing down. If the crystal's any good it'll be worth a lot. Probably not, though. The blade was crackling when he was

using it, and that's usually the sign of a crack."

"I'm sure there's some 'upstanding' individuals here who would be happy to give you a price," Maz said with a playful smile. "In the meantime. Do make yourselves at home. Takodona is as safe as any place in the galaxy."

Despite her words, Finn still looked restless. The look on his face made it look as though he was going to bolt straight for the nearest ship. Aliana set the lightsaber down and looked at him. She already knew he was a Stormtrooper, the guilt and panic rolling off him was almost identical to every Stormtrooper she'd met just before she'd killed them.

She laid a hand on his shoulder and motioned for him to follow her, "C'mon, I wanna talk to you."

Finn all but flinched when he saw Aliana's gaze on him and concern flooded his system when she ushered him to follow her. On some level he knew he could trust her, but the knowledge of her capabilities did put him on edge a little bit. After a moment's hesitation, he got up to follow her. She led him outside into the courtyard and around a secluded corner away from anyone who might wander by or overhear them.

"Finn, are you okay?" she asked, her hand on his arm, "You seem frightened and distracted."

"Look, you don't know the First Order like I do, alright?" Finn huffed, glancing around, "I get that you can take out Kylo Ren, but that isn't going to help you when there's a swarm of blaster fire bearing down on you, or turbolasers. They have more than just a Dark Jedi, they have a lot more firepower than that. When you see the First Order, the safest thing to do is to run as far as you can."

Aliana looked at him with even more concern than before. It was clear that Finn was terrified of being hunted down for treason. Anyone who'd just deserted probably wouldn't feel all that happy about joining up in a war against the people they'd just tried to get away from. Worse even, she knew exactly how the First Order got its recruits, which meant Finn was taken as a baby and conditioned his entire life to serve. No childhood, no chance to forge his own identity. He was, effectively, a slave to a cause he'd never asked for. There was no doubt that he was dealing with an intense amount of trauma. Trauma that she knew all too well.

What the First Order did to Finn was appalling and sick. What made it worse was that it reminded Aliana far too much of the Jedi. "Finn, I promise you that the First Order won't be able to lay a blaster bolt on you as long as I'm around," she said, squeezing his arm.

Finn was silent for a moment. Despite the fear that he was feeling telling him that those were just empty words, they felt reassuring. Aliana's presence felt oddly reassuring. As he thought about it, he made it this far away from the First Order thanks to her. He knew she was capable and that she wanted to help. There was so very little he was certain of after defecting. Still, he felt he could be certain of her at least.

"Well... thank you," He said with a nod. "I appreciate that and... I guess I should stick around to cover your back too, huh?"

"Well, I..." Aliana was about to crack a joke, when she stopped. She knew Finn was a defector of the First Order. She could probably... at the very least it'd be nice to have one person she could call a friend that knew, "Actually there's something you should know."

She stepped back from him and pulled her lightsaber off her belt, holding it up and activating it. The crimson blade shot out of the hilt with a sharp squeal and bathed both of them in red light.

“I’m a Sith Lord,” she said. “Darth Amorosa.”

Finn jumped back a good foot, less shocked by the revelation that he already knew and more started by the sight of her drawn weapon. “Jeez!” he squeaked before clearing his throat. “Ahem, I mean... OK. I believe you and... I’d appreciate it if you put that away now.”

“Sorry,” Aliana said, deactivating her lightsaber and hooking it back onto her belt. “I’d appreciate it if you didn’t tell Rey. I... it’s nice having friends I guess? I’ve travelled alone for a very long time and I don’t want to risk ruining everything. She’s probably not going to be around for very long, so I’d like to make the most of it.”

Finn went to say something before he hesitated and thought about Aliana’s request. He nodded in understanding and stepped closer to her. “...I won’t tell her... so long as you don’t tell her that I was a Stormtrooper,” he said, deciding he could trust Aliana with that information. “I... I don’t know if I’m gonna stick around for much longer but... I’d hate to leave on bad terms with Rey... or you.”

“I... I already knew. The Force, ya know?” Aliana shrugged, “That’s why I figured I could tell you.”

“...Oh, OK that’s fair,” Finn conceded. “So, when we get the information to the Resistance, what’s your next move?”

“I... don’t know really,” Aliana frowned, looking down at her feet, “I promised this dying old man in Tuanul that I’d help fight the First Order, but honestly I don’t think the Resistance would accept me. General Organa already knows who I am, and she didn’t seem all that pleased that I was involved in the first place. Maybe hunt Kylo Ren? Seems about the best thing I could do.”

“Well...” Finn paused, trying to find the right words for what he wished to say. “Perhaps you could want some company? Outcasts looking out for each other... or something?”

Aliana looked up and smiled, “Maybe. It’d be nice. I made the offer to Rey, but I don’t know if that’ll hold with her wanting to go back home and... well I’ll have to tell her eventually. I can’t NOT use my lightsaber forever.” She looked out toward the forest, watching a few trees sway in the wind, “I do intend to fight the First Order, though. I’m not running.”

Finn’s gaze fell to his feet. Despite the reassurance of this talk, he still wasn’t sure if he wanted to stay and fight or run and hide. His first thought on escaping was to run. He hadn’t thought about it beyond that. Just to get away from the First Order and figure it out from there. Turning around and fighting them just seemed like asking to be shot. But... if he didn’t there was no guarantee that Rey or Aliana wouldn’t be put in danger. Sure they could take care of themselves, but if something *did* happen to them he would never know. Poe had already been killed, and the fear and adrenaline had kept him from really dealing with his loss. He wasn’t certain he could do that again.

At the very least he still had some time to think about it before they made their next move. He just hoped that the First Order wouldn’t catch up to him before then. “I see... I guess it’s a good thing I defected when I did, huh?” Finn said. “I certainly wouldn’t want to be up against you in a fight.”

“I wouldn’t want to be against you either,” Aliana said softly, turning her attention back to him, “You’re my friend, Finn. I don’t want to have to fight you.”

Finn clapped a hand on Aliana's shoulder. "...I'll watch your back if you watch mine."

"Deal. I know it might seem cruel to some, especially Jedi, but I don't show mercy to anyone who attacks me," Aliana said, shaking her head, "My mother made that mistake once, and it killed her."

Finn felt a twisting in his stomach. "Oh... I'm sorry," he said softly.

Aliana shook her head again, "Don't be. You haven't done anything." She felt a shiver run up her spine as she remembered that day so many years ago. She shut her eyes tightly and tried to force the thoughts from her mind. "We should go back inside," she said, "Thanks for understanding."

"Yeah no problem. ... Good talk," he said somewhat awkwardly. "Glad we had it."

With that Finn followed her back into the castle. As they stepped through the entrance, they saw BB-8 rolling up to them. The droid gave the two a series of concerned beeps. Apparently the table sent him to go check on them. "We're alright, sweetie," Aliana smiled, reaching down and patting his semi-dome, "Just had a chat."

If the Sith effortlessly disarming and almost killing him wasn't bad enough, the inevitable report to the Supreme Leader was the perfect cherry on top of what was quickly becoming the single worst day of his life. Kylo Ren's anxiety hadn't abated since he'd fled the Fury, and without his lightsaber he couldn't vent his anger on every solid surface like he usually could. And it was a lot harder to keep the crew in line without it.

Especially not since many Stormtroopers had started to refer to the Sith as "Amorosa from Human Resources" when word got out that she'd stolen his weapon.

As Ren rode the turbolift to the Supreme Leader's throne room on the *Supremacy*, he could hear the remarks and snickering of his subordinates in his head. It was infuriating. He'd been made into a laughingstock on his own ship, and now on the Supreme Leader's dreadnought. He kept assuring himself that he would put the Sith in her place, but the knowledge of how she'd effortlessly overpowered him without even drawing her lightsaber wouldn't leave his thoughts.

Taking a deep breath, he stepped onto the bridge and looked up at the throne. Snoke was sitting there, looking very displeased.

"Supreme Leader," he said, kneeling before him, "I've discovered the identity of the renegade Sith."

"Have you?" Snoke asked, his raspy voice echoing slightly in the open space of the chambers. "I am rather surprised you demonstrate any capability when this Sith is involved." His tone was thick with sarcasm and condescension. "And what have you learned from the Sith's identity, my apprentice. Surely something useful. You wouldn't be foolish enough to approach me otherwise."

"Her name is Darth Amorosa, and she was last seen flying an ancient Fury-Class Imperial Interceptor," Ren explained, trying to push past Snoke's patronizing tone and focus on delivering whatever information he possibly could to redeem himself in his master's eyes, "I've personally been on the ship. It is a capable vessel that would prove to be an asset if we can capture it. And the Sith and her Apprentice would be valuable if they could be recruited."

The last bit caught Snoke's attention. "Her apprentice, you say?" Snoke asked, each word drawn out as he leaned forward slightly in interest. A small smile spread across his heavily grotesque face. "A malleable mind already familiar with the dark side? That would be an excellent resource for us." His expression sobered slightly as he looked back down at Ren. "How confident are you that this apprentice can be turned to our cause? If their master has proven to be your superior, it may prove difficult to convince them of our strength."

"The Sith is not my superior!" Ren hissed, staring down at the floor, "I... simply underestimated her. I will not make that mistake again, Master. I *will* destroy her, and her apprentice will be *mine*!"

Snoke narrowed his eyes at Ren, tempted to reprimand him for the outburst alone. "I had such high hopes for you. Your bloodline is so strong in the Force. I looked at you and saw potential. A force of nature that could rival your grandfather." He paused and bore his gaze down at Ren, ensuring that the Dark Jedi could feel his power and disappointment through the force. "This is your last chance to convince me that I wasn't mistaken. When next we speak, you best have completed your mission."

"Yes, Master," Ren said, quietly seething with rage. He stood up and slowly left the room, his mind burning with hatred for the Sith and determination to destroy her and take her apprentice for himself.

"Look General, I'm telling you if a Stormtrooper can renounce the First Order and salvage the mission, there's no reason to think a Sith can't be our ally," Poe said as he followed an increasingly irritated Leia around the base, "She saved my life and she has BB-8! Why are you so convinced this is a trap?"

"The Sith live to deceive, Captain. It's how they operate," Leia replied, her voice firm in its conviction. "Emperor Palpatine spent years of his life convincing the galaxy that he only wanted what was best for the Republic when he was only concerned with gaining more power. Even if this Sith is unlike any the galaxy has ever seen and truly means well, we have no way of knowing that it will stay that way."

"But Emperor Palpatine kept his identity secret," Poe argued, "Amorosa identified herself the moment she answered your call! She has been completely transparent with you. If something went bad or something suspicious happens, she's going to be the immediate suspect. Why paint a target like that on her back if not to show that she can be trusted?"

Leia sighed. "Poe, your heart is in the right place, but you don't know the Sith like I do. They have secrets upon secrets. What happens if we accept her aid to fight the First Order and she comes out of the war stronger because of our efforts? What happens when the Sith shares no common enemy with us anymore? These are important things to consider."

"Well we won't have to consider it if the First Order wipes us out," Poe said, sighing in exasperation, "General, why are we so determined to find Luke Skywalker? Because we need the Jedi. A single lightsaber on the battlefield inspires so many people. Well, a lightsaber just fell into our lap while we're scrabbling to find one, and you want to turn it away just because you *think* she might deceive us? We might not find Luke. We might find Luke only for him to refuse to fight. There's a skilled Force User out there, with two people in tow who are strong in the Force. This is a gold mine, General!"

“You are out of line, Captain,” Leia said, her frown deepening. “The Sith have caused nothing but death and misery to the galaxy and I will not risk the future of the Republic for short term gain.” She let out an exasperated sigh and turned her attention back to the holo terminal before her. “You are dismissed.”

Poe wanted to continue to argue. It was probably his best trait, aside from flying a starfighter. As far as he was concerned, Leia was throwing away an extremely valuable asset based on information that wasn’t holding up to reality. Amorosa had so many opportunities to take out the Resistance, and never took a single one. She could have killed him and written his death off as the fighter crashing and nobody would have batted an eye. Instead she’d saved his life and brought him back to the Resistance. She knew exactly where the Resistance base was. If she was a First Order spy, she would have completed her mission in totality. She had the information to destroy the Resistance once and for all, and she wasn’t acting on it.

After his experience with Finn, Poe was convinced that this Sith was not an enemy. And he was convinced that Leia’s fear would do more harm than good. He needed to get hold of her.

“Captain!” a voice shouted behind her.

Poe turned around to see Paige Tico running up to him. “Apologies, Captain, but you left medbay before we completed your examination. The medbot is asking I return you to them immediately.” Her eyes scanned Poe up and down to see if there were any obvious signs of him being unwell. “... Although you appear to be well enough. I could tell them that I gave you a medscan myself and that everything is green.”

“Appreciate it,” Poe said, an idea suddenly hitting him, “Listen, Paige. Can you get me the holo-frequency for Darth Amorosa? I want to get into contact with her. I don’t like Leia’s dismissal of her help, I think it’s extremely self-destructive.”

Paige just stared wide-eyed at Poe, dead silent for a moment. “... I... memory of the holo-frequency would be in the command centers main computer. It’s just that without the General’s clearance, it could be tricky, and treasonous, to get a hold of. Are... are you sure it’s that important?” She asked.

In truth, she did meet Darth Amorosa, if only for a moment at the safehouse. She was surprisingly reasonable and respectful for what she expected of a Sith, which wasn’t even considering the fact that she brought Poe back to them alive. She knew that might not have been enough to go on in terms of possibly committing treason, but Captain’s Dameron endorsement just might.

“We need a lightsaber on our side, if only to inspire people,” Poe argued, “I don’t care if that lightsaber is blue, green, red or purple. She’s helping us, despite Leia’s dismissal. We can’t turn that down.”

Paige bit her lip as she thought it over. The mission to find Luke Skywalker was considered their most important one to date. If having someone who could use the force was this important, perhaps this was worth the risk.

“... I think I have a favor or two from those in the command center. I’ll see what I can do.”

Aliana groaned when she heard her comlink start beeping in her pocket. Pulling it out, she excused herself and withdrew to an empty table, “What is it, 2V?”

“Pardon me, Miss Beniko, but you have another call coming to your personal holo-channel,” 2V’s voice said from the other end, “It’s the pilot you rescued from Jakku.”

“Dameron?” Aliana looked surprised, “That’s odd... tell him to hold on. I’ll be right there.”

With a quick word to Rey that she’d be back, Aliana took off into a run toward the Fury. Once inside, she activated the main holoterminal in the center of the flight deck and saw the image of Poe Dameron projected before her.

“This is Darth Amorosa of the Sith Warship Fury,” Aliana recited, “What can I do for you, Captain?”

“Well for starters, I want to thank you for saving my life,” Poe said with a smile. “I’d likely be rotting in the desert right now if you hadn’t come along. Second... is BB-8 OK?”

“He’s a little banged up, but otherwise he’s alright,” Aliana nodded, “He doesn’t actually know you’re alive, though. I couldn’t identify you so I didn’t want to get his hopes up.”

“That’s fair,” Poe said with a nod. “I’ll be sure to greet him myself when you all get to D’Qar.” His expression became slightly more serious. “We can expect you to join the others when they arrive, correct? I don’t mean to sound desperate, since you’ve done so much for us already, but we can certainly use someone like you in the Resistance.”

“I got the impression that I wasn’t welcome when I spoke with General Organa,” Aliana said, raising an eyebrow, “She gave me a lot of backhanded remarks and thinly veiled accusations of deceit. Has she had a change of heart?”

Poe sucked air through his teeth. “Well she would certainly have me ousted if she knew I was calling you if that answers your questions,” he said with a grimace. “The general has her reasons for not trusting you, but I don’t have to agree with those reasons or ignore their lack of rationality. The fact of the matter is, you’ve already proven yourself trustworthy and we cannot afford to be picky. Like, maybe this is all some kind of grand fourth dimensional evil Sith scheme of yours, but if the galaxy has to perish for that plan to fail, then it’s not worth turning you away.”

“Oh good, my secret plans to revive the Sith Order and gain the trust of the galaxy get to stay alive just a little while longer,” Aliana snickered, leaning back against a console, “Oh yeah, your Stormtrooper friend is here too. He’s doing alright, but it looks like the First Order’s got him spooked.”

“Well, it’s good to know he’s OK,” Poe said with a smile. “Finn’s easy to spook, but he’s got a good heart. Give him a little push and he’ll do the right thing.” The captain looked over his shoulder, as if checking as to whether he was being watched. “I can try to smooth things over before you all arrive, but I can’t guarantee that they’ll pull out the welcome wagon when you land. But they will listen, whether they like it or not.”

“Honestly, Organa doesn’t bother me,” Aliana shook her head, “Jedi are always obstinate and hostile. I’ve seen that kind of behavior before, and honestly I have no interest in reviving an ancient and pointless blood feud. I’ll help you regardless of whether Organa welcomes me or not.”

“Good to hear. Thanks, Darth,” Poe said before pausing and then chuckling. “Huh... never thought I’d hear myself say that.” He scratched the back of his head awkwardly. “So, uh. Do I just call you Darth? Or Lord Amorosa or...?”

“Lord Amorosa will do for now,” Aliana nodded, “I have a name, but I’d prefer my Sith name for most people.”

“Understood. Thank you again, your lordship,” Poe said respectfully. “Is there anything else about the situation we should know?”

“First of all, I said Lord Amorosa, not your lordship,” Aliana said, pursing her lips, “Second, I’m trying to get Rey and Finn on a clean ship to D’Qar. The First Order intercepted the Fury, and Kylo Ren boarded us. I disarmed him and almost killed him, but he used the Force to hurt Rey and I had to let him go to check on her. I kept his lightsaber, though.”

Poe’s eyes widened. He very much remembered Kylo Ren. He remembered being taken prisoner by him. He certainly remembered the Dark Jedi invading his mind and peering into his memories, as much as he’d like to forget. His experience with force users was very limited up to that point and his first encounter was extremely unpleasant. To recruit someone who could defeat him so easily...

“... Yeah, we definitely need you on our side,” he said plainly.

Aliana cocked an eyebrow at Poe’s reaction to what she considered to be a mundane piece of information, “Something the matter, Captain? You seem... distressed.”

Poe shook his head. “Oh, it’s nothing. It’s just... my experience with Kylo Ren was... less than pleasant,” he said, his face contorting in phantom pains. Something he was more than capable of ignoring when there were more pressing matters to take his mind off the experience. Less so when the conversation forced him to dwell on it.

Aliana’s air of professionalism dropped and she looked at him with concern, “Are you going to be alright? It looks like whatever he’s done is sticking with you.”

“I...” he paused, unsure what to say. “... I can worry about what he’s done later. I don’t think it’s going to... go away, but I can work past it for now.”

“Alright,” Aliana nodded, deciding not to press the issue further. Whatever Ren had done was something Poe clearly didn’t want to talk about, and trying to force him to would only make things worse, “Well if it’s any consolation, I fully intend to kill him.”

That did bring a smile back to Poe’s face. “I certainly appreciate that, Lord Amorosa,” he said gratefully. “We’ll help you with that in any way we can once you arrive.”

“I appreciate the help. Amorosa out,” Aliana said, shutting off the holoterminal. She sighed and sat down on the couch, rubbing her eyes. Not only was the Dark Jedi trying to murder everything he sees, but he’d apparently done something to the pilot that was enough to cause lasting psychological damage. Kylo Ren might be a joke to her, but to people who can’t use the Force, even he would be frightening.

She stood up and realized just how tired she was. She’d barely slept during the flight to Takodana, and she was starting to feel the effects. She took a deep breath and tried to collect herself before exiting the Fury and returning to Maz’s castle. She could sleep later.

For now, she wanted to be with her friends.

Chapter End Notes

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Lightsaber of Legends

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“No, Alie you have to twist it the other way,” Rey snickered.

Aliana tried in vain, but she couldn’t get the fuel converter she was working on to open, “I think mine’s broken.”

“You gotta turn it with your whole arm, not just your wrist,” Rey said, trying to keep her laughing under control.

“I’m turning it with my whole body! I’m telling you, it won’t budge!” Aliana said indignantly.

Rey was almost a sputtering mess by this point. She’d returned to teaching Aliana how to perform maintenance on common ship components, but Aliana seemed to have a mental block when it came to machinery. She’d been fumbling with the fuel converter for a half hour trying to get it to open, but no matter what she tried it just wouldn’t budge.

Rey didn’t have the heart to tell her that the lock was still on.

After another attempt made in vain, Aliana slumped against the wall of the engine room. “Once again, technology goes out of it’s way to spite me. It’s a whole mechanical conspiracy or something.”

“Would you like some assistance with your task, Master?” 2V asked, poking his head through the door.

“Why should I trust you?” Aliana asked with narrowed eyes. “For all I know you’re in on the conspiracy.”

“I assure you I have no intention of betraying you, Master,” 2V said with utmost sincerity, having not grasped the hyperbole.

“You know, if I didn’t have you I’d have gone mad,” Aliana smiled.

Rey smiled softly and reached over, plucking the fuel converter from her lap. She flicked the lock and twisted the upper half and the intake hatch opened without complaint. Aliana stared at it, and then glared at Rey.

“You let me struggle with that for a half hour?!” she scoffed.

“You put on too good a show,” Rey said between fits of laughter. “Besides, now you won’t forget about the lock.”

Aliana grumbled before moving back over to the engine. “Okay... now what?”

“Now you take a wire brush and slide it into the intake hatch,” Rey said, handing her a strip of metal with a large wire scrubber on the end, “And you scrub the hatch and the pipes clean of smoke and residue.”

Aliana took the wire and began scrubbing the hatch. She grimaced, hoping not to get any oil or other forms of gunk onto her robes. She couldn't pull off the dirty, sexy mechanic look like Rey could. "How do I tell if I'm done?" she asked. "Inside of the hatch is pretty dark."

Rey reached out and handed her a flashlight. Aliana looked at it for a solid thirty seconds before taking it, "Alright I guess that was obvious."

"It's a good thing you're pretty," Rey snickered, only to immediately realize what she'd said a split second later.

Aliana paused for a moment before turning back to look at Rey with a cheeky grin. "Oh? You think I'm pretty?" she asked in amusement.

Rey's face was flushed and she looked like she wanted to kick herself, "You're gorgeous, now focus on the fuel converter!" she turned away to hide her ever-reddening face.

"Oh, darling! Do go on!" Aliana teased, shifting her weight slightly to lean against Rey. Her wide smile was half due to how amusing Rey's slip of the tongue was, and half in joy at how Rey actually thought she was attractive.

"I'm not going to go on, clean the converter and stop mocking me for stating a fact!" Rey huffed as she pushed Aliana away.

"So my beauty is a fact?" Aliana cooed. "How bold of you to proclaim something as indisputable truth!" After that she relented, if only for a moment and turned her attention back to the converter. Still, the smile never left her face.

Aliana had managed to clean the converter of most of the dirt and grime that had built up over the years, and with Rey's guidance had managed to install it back onto the engines. She was actually rather pleased with herself, as ship machinery had always been her biggest weakness. Sure, cleaning a fuel converter might not be that impressive, but it was one less thing she had to rely on 2V for. And the Fury was one step closer to being back in pristine condition.

Aliana wiped her forehead, only to regret her actions when she realized her hands were covered in engine grease and she'd just smeared it on her face, "And just like that all my pride is gone," she winced.

Rey chuckled softly, reaching to grab a rag she had on hand for just such a situation. "You are hopeless, here."

Aliana expected Rey to simply hand her the rag. Instead, she had come over to wipe the grease from Aliana's face herself. The act brought them in close proximity to each other, barely a hair's breadth apart. Aliana could take in every detail of Rey's impossible beauty. From her hair to her eyes to the way her mouth quirked when she rubbed the cloth across her forehead.

'Take it easy, star,' she told herself, 'She may be beautiful, and brilliant and one of the nicest women you've ever met, but stop getting your hopes up.'

When Rey finally stepped back, the rag was covered in grease and Aliana reached up to touch her cheek. It was still a little slimy, but a good shower would take care of that. "I think I need a shower," Aliana nodded, cracking her knuckles nervously, "Why don't you go find Finn and... I dunno, find lunch? Save me a seat?"

“Oh sure,” Rey said with a smile before the image of Aliana in a shower suddenly popped into her mind. Trying to conceal the pink that returned to her cheeks she turned and left the engine room while trying to appear casual about it. As she exited the ship, her mind couldn’t stop returning to what had happened between them.

‘Did I really say all those things?’ she thought as she stepped through the river, taking a moment to marvel at kicking so much water at once, *‘What’s wrong with me today?’*

She hadn’t been this tongue-tied when she’d first met Aliana. In fact, she’d tried to pinpoint when exactly all of this had started. Perhaps on the way to Takodana? That was the earliest point she could remember.

This was never something she ever thought about before. She rarely ever saw anyone in a romantic light. Of course, ‘before’ meaning before she even knew a woman could be with another woman. Perhaps that was it? She never felt romantic inclinations before Aliana because she was looking in the wrong direction?

Rey shook her head and sighed. This was ridiculous. She’d just met Aliana a week ago, the idea that she’d be romantically interested in her was ludicrous. No, she was just... attractive. Yeah, that sounded about right. Aliana had admitted to the same thing, that she got flustered around pretty girls, and she thought Rey was pretty. It must be that.

Satisfied with her conclusion, she picked up her pace toward the castle.

“There has to be some way to track them,” Poe said as they stood around the holomap, “I don’t like just waiting for a transport to get here. We need that map now! And I miss my droid!”

Paige looked at Poe with concern in her eyes. “Captain, as unfortunate as it is, I don’t know what other option we have. We have the Fury’s frequency but not the equipment to track it to its source. If we did, then we could safely bet the First Order would be able to track them as well, and they’d reach them faster than we ever could.”

“And the First Order could already be tracking them,” Poe exclaimed, “Sith or no Sith, a thousand Stormtroopers can destroy way too much way too quickly. There’s got to be some way to figure out where Amorosa took them...”

Paige was quiet. The vast majority of her life had taught her that the Sith were manipulative monsters, yet in their brief encounter, Amorosa proved to be anything but. If she were trying to lead the Resistance into a trap with this game of lost and found, as the General believed, the trail should have been easier to follow. As odd as she felt admitting it to herself, she wanted to find her and the others as much as Poe did. The question was, how?

“The General might have an idea what to do,” Paige offered. “Though... I don’t think she’ll be on board.”

“BB-8 has the map to her brother, that’ll be enough for her to think of something,” Poe remarked, examining all the data they’d managed to gather, as well as the planets surrounding Jakku, “Unless... you don’t think Maz has heard from any of them, do you?”

“Maz Kanata?” Paige asked, furrowing her brow in thought. “... It’s possible. She is one of the Resistance’s best informants. Seems to know everyone in the galaxy really.” She looked up from

the holomap. “We could try and contact her.”

“Get Maz on the comms immediately,” Poe nodded, “At the very least she might know about the two new recruits.”

“Look, I just don’t see the point, alright?” Finn shrugged as he took a bite of his food, his hands quivering as the subject of the conversation turned to war, “You saw what they did on Jakku. They destroyed that entire outpost just from sheer numbers alone. There is no fight against the First Order. Not one we can win.”

Rey sighed and laid her hand over his, “We have to try at least. Otherwise we’re just prolonging the inevitable.”

Finn’s fear of the First Order was strange. She’d seen people be nervous about them, but someone this terrified was new to her. Perhaps living on Jakku her entire life, which had avoided the interest of most of the Galaxy outside of the odd skirmish over scrap, meant she didn’t see most of the Galaxy. But hearing others, particularly Aliana, talk about the First Order they seemed like bumbling fools. Sure, a blaster and a starfighter were dangerous, but they couldn’t be powerful enough to threaten the Republic.

“Finn, is there something else going on?” she asked, gently squeezing his hand.

Finn was silent for a moment. He knew that he had to tell Rey the truth about himself, that much was obvious. Even still, the way Rey looked at him, with such concern and care. He was terrified that the truth would make those things disappear forever.

Nevertheless, he had to try.

“I... I’m scared of the First Order because... I know what they can do.” He admitted. “I told you that I was a Resistance Fighter but... that was a lie. I was a Stormtrooper.”

Rey sat back, surprised. She’d always felt an odd vibe from Finn, but she hadn’t been expecting this, “You said you *were* a Stormtrooper? You’re not anymore?” she asked.

Finn shook his head, “On my first battle, I couldn’t bring myself to shoot the villagers they wanted wiped out. I decided I wasn’t going to kill for them, so I ran.” His hand was shaking and he avoided looking Rey in the eye, “Right into you.”

“Right into the end of my staff, you mean,” Rey quipped, trying to keep the mood light. It resulted in a restrained laugh from Finn, so it worked at least a little.

“Finn, you did the right thing by leaving them,” Rey assured him. “You said no to their evil and refused to be a part of it. That was the right thing to do. But now you can keep doing the right thing by standing against them! By stopping them from killing any more people.”

“But they can’t be stopped. They have millions of Stormtroopers, weapons that would make the Death Star look like a probe droid,” Finn said, squeezing her hand, “And a crack squad of elite Force Sensitives. How... how is there any hope against that kind of power?”

“No matter how dark the night becomes, the sun will always rise,” Rey said soothingly “We may very well live to see the light return to the galaxy, but only if we stand and fight.”

Finn was surprised at how... poetic Rey's words sounded. But they did make his anxiety settle just that little bit to be more open to listen. He stared down at the table and thought long and hard about where he was going. Was it really worth it to run? Would the First Order just find him anyway? He'd risk his own death a lot more if he did try to fight, but...

Was he really all that safe anywhere? If he was still afraid on a Smuggler's planet with a war hero and a Sith always nearby, would he really feel safe anywhere?

"...Maybe you're right," Finn nodded, "I'm already afraid now even around friends. I'd be even more afraid alone."

"Afraid of what alone?" Aliana asked as she sat down beside Rey, "What's going on?"

"We were talking about whether it's smarter to stay and fight or hide," Finn explained.

"Fight," Aliana said matter-of-factly, "If you fight, you have a chance of winning. If you hide, you're only prolonging the inevitable. The First Order would conquer more and more of the galaxy and you'd soon run out of places to hide. We might not be able to win, but we definitely won't win if we just lie down and give up."

"Yes! Thank you!" Rey smiled. Aliana had a knack for being there for her when she needed it.

Aliana smiled at the plate they'd saved for her and dug in, happy to finally have something to eat after hours of working on the ship. She was curious about what their conversation had entailed, but shrugged and let it slip from her mind.

"Any word on Maz? Any idea if she's making progress on a transport?" she asked.

"We asked her earlier," Finn answered "-but then a Rondian-"

"Rodian," Rey corrected.

"That, yes, pulled a blaster on her and it turned into a whole thing. She's dealing with that right now. Told us she'd have an update later."

Aliana sighed in exasperation, wondering exactly what was going on with Maz. The previous times she'd been here she was able to summon ships and crew as if from thin air, and now she was struggling to find even one. Probably the First Order making more people skittish? Frankly if her ship hadn't been ID'd she'd just fly them there herself. In fact, she wasn't above just doing that and damning the consequences anyway.

"Well, guess we'd better get comfy here," she shrugged, "When Han gets back we need to see if there's any favors he can call in."

Maz had only just taken care of the Rodian when her holoterminal started to beep. Curious as to who could be calling at this hour, she flicked it on and was delighted to see Poe Dameron's face staring back at her.

"Captain Dameron," she smiled, "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"A question, Miss Kanata," Poe replied. "Your connections run pretty deep-"

“Flatterer,” she said with a coy smirk.

“-Are you familiar with a Sith Lord by the name of Darth Amorosa?” Poe asked.

“Hmmm, I may know the name,” Max replied, feigning deniability. “Has she caused any problems for you and your cause?”

“Quite the opposite in fact,” Poe said. “She might be the best thing to happen to this Resistance in a long time.”

“Is that so?” Maz asked, “What has she done to warrant such reverence?”

“Saved my ass, for starters,” Poe answered, somewhat sheepishly. “And has offered the Resistance aid in one of our most important missions to date. She’s offered to rendezvous with us back at HQ but she’s gone dark for awhile and we don’t know if we can wait much longer.”

“Well, I have seen the young Sith, and it seems that she’s the reason your mission went so badly in the first place and she’s determined to fix it,” Max explained, leaving out the detail that the Sith and her companions were on Takodana as they spoke. The Sith had demanded secrecy, lest the First Order be tapping transmissions, “She didn’t stay long, and she left with two companions. One of them is strong in the Force, considerably stronger than the Sith herself.”

“Really?” Poe said, notably impressed. He thought he remembered Amorosa saying she was traveling with others, though he didn’t remember her saying they were strong in the Force for whatever reason. “Well, if those two are willing to join the fight, they will hear no argument from me.”

“I’m sure that will be good news,” Maz nodded, wondering how she could prod the Resistance to Takodana and speed up the collection of the Sith and her companions. Then an idea hit her, “You know, I have sensitive information that might be useful to you, but you’ll need to come here to receive it. I can’t share it over a transmission.”

Poe nodded. “Understood. I’ll be there with a light force if we can spare the people.”

“I’ll be seeing you in a couple of days then,” Maz nodded. She knew that no matter how dangerous the situation, Leia would never pass up information from her. She just hoped that she didn’t alert the First Order as well. As she shut off the holoterminal, she looked out to the cantina at the three sat together by the table.

“A Stormtrooper, a Scavenger and a Sith walk into my bar...”

He finally had a lead. Takodana. At the very least if it wasn’t the map, the girl and the Sith, it was *something* that could lead him to any of the three. Kylo Ren set down his datapad and picked up the tube of metals and wires that was swiftly becoming his new lightsaber. With a lead to go on, he could have a strike force on the planet within a few days.

The rest of his men weren’t so optimistic. Phasma and Hux were challenging his authority more and more, believing him to be obsessed with finding Skywalker and getting revenge on the Sith. They would see, once he had everything he needed. He would crush them both and take the girl as his apprentice.

As he looked up from his lightsaber to double-check his datapad, he froze when he saw someone sitting across from him. The same girl he'd incapacitated on the Fury, talking as if other people were in the room. He blinked and she was gone.

Odd, he thought. Nothing like that had ever occurred before. Was it a sign from the Force? An omen of what was to come? Surely he saw that girl for a reason. Surely that meant he was destined to take her from the Sith and her disgusting nature, teach her the true power of the Dark Side and take her as his apprentice.

His thoughts went back to what he felt aboard the interceptor. He sensed the Sith's feelings for the girl. Such feelings were a blight on the Force. The Force ran strong in bloodlines, and this Sith was willfully dooming her own to extinction. Once he had the girl in his clutches, she would see the vile creature that he had saved her from and look upon him as her hero. That would be the twist in the blade that he imagined plunging into the Sith's gut. The ultimate price for her insolence and his humiliation.

Outside his quarters, a few passing Stormtroopers stopped by the door and leaned their helmets against it.

"Is he muttering to himself and cackling?" one of them asked.

"Guy's gone off the deep end."

"You ever thought about quitting and working for the Sith?"

"Quit how? Our severance package is to be literally severed in half, Carl."

Three days on Takodana had seemed to fly by, but while things had been rocky at first the three of them were almost inseparable by now. Aliana had taken to giving Rey and Finn lightsaber training under the guise of vibroblade exercises. At the very least she could give them some useful knowledge and hope they figure it out from there. The two were doing well, and had even been able to disarm her on two separate occasions each.

Han and Chewie, meanwhile, had touched back down on Takodana the day before with no luck in securing a transport. With each passing day, he and Aliana were more and more inclined to just take their own ships and take the risk, though Han seemed to be nudging Aliana to volunteer more than thinking about volunteering himself.

For Rey, however, things were getting worse. She was experiencing these strange feelings around Aliana, and not like she normally did. Occasionally when she looked at her, she would feel these brief flashes of murderous hatred that felt so alien to her that it was almost like something was piloting her body. And other times she could have sworn she saw someone staring at her from the corner of her eye, only to blink and see nothing.

She had no idea what was going on, but she knew she didn't like it and wanted it to-

"Rey!" Aliana yelled.

Rey snapped out of her thoughts and yanked her head in the direction of Aliana, "W-what?"

"You were staring off into space again," Aliana said, gently squeezing her arm, "You alright?"

“O-Oh, yeah! Sorry, Alie I was... I’ve just been a little out of it, it seems.” Rey said, clearing her throat, looking for a cover story. “So much has happened in such a short amount of time. It’s hard to process sometimes.”

Aliana gave Rey a warm smile. “Yeah, I get that,” she replied, gently rubbing one shoulder. It was true that a lot had changed for Rey in the past week, including Rey herself. After the first few days aboard the Fury, Rey just stopped talking about going back to Jakku, as if she had changed her mind about the whole thing. She was proud at how far Rey had already come.

Rey felt comforted by the contact, which made her brief moments of inexplicable hatred she felt all the more... inexplicable. Was she sick or something? Some odd brain virus? She couldn’t say. All she knew was that she wanted it to stop. She liked Aliana and she wanted whatever it was that said otherwise to go away. “You think we’ll be here much longer?” Rey asked.

“If Maz can’t secure us a transport to the Resistance, we may just roll the dice and fly to the Resistance ourselves?” Aliana answered. “Why? Feeling a little cabin fever?”

“... Honestly? A little bit,” Rey admitted. “I mean, don’t get me wrong, this place is very nice, but it just makes me think about all the other kinds of planets that are out there. Just waiting to be explored. There could be a planet made entirely of water! Could you imagine!?”

“I don’t need to imagine, I know of two,” Aliana smiled, squeezing Rey’s arm, “We’ll make that our next stop after Kashyyyk, how’s that sound?”

“That sounds-” Rey’s bright face fell and her head turned toward the castle. She could feel something ominous coming from it. It was... calling her name? That couldn’t be right, “Alie... something’s calling me.”

Aliana looked at the castle. She felt it as well. Something connected to the Force was in the castle. Something other than their present company. She hadn’t noticed it in the time they had been there, meaning it was perhaps dormant all this time. If it was calling out to Rey now...

“... What do you mean?” Aliana said, feigning ignorance. Even now, as her friend was having a potential Force crisis, she couldn’t quite bring herself to admit her secret to perhaps the one being in the galaxy who still didn’t know.

“It’s like... it’s like a voice from inside. Calling out to me,” Rey said, taking a step toward the castle, “Will you come with me? I want to check it out.”

Aliana nodded, “Of course. Lead the way.”

Rey nodded and led Aliana into Maz’s castle. As she listened for the voice calling out to her, she turned down into a corridor that led down into the castle basements, “It’s... coming from down here.”

Aliana followed along behind her, her hand on her lightsaber in case there was a trap waiting for them. As the two drew nearer, Rey seemed to grow increasingly nervous. She was coming to realize that she didn’t like voices in her head. Or any of the alien sensations she’d been experiencing the last few days. She reached back, blindly fumbling for Aliana’s arm for support. Aliana instead took Rey’s hand in her own and squeezed gently to let her know she was right behind her.

With that bit of reassurance, they moved forward down the dimly lit corridor. On either side of the long walls was a series of wooden doors. Rey's eyes darted side to side as if she was trying to discern from behind which door this mystery voice was calling to her. Aliana believed she had the source pinpointed but allowed Rey to lead the way regardless. "Are we close?"

"I think so," Rey said, pushing the door open and stepping inside. It was a small storage closet with a wooden chest on a small table, "There. That chest. That's where the voice is coming from."

Aliana nodded, though kept the grip on her saber firm. She knew at least twelve lethal things in the galaxy that could fit in a chest that size.

Rey reached out carefully. As she came closer, the calling became louder, almost deafening. A part of her wanted to just flee, but Alie's presence assured her enough to press forward. In a quick motion, she opened the chest before leaping back from whatever was inside. What her eyes fell upon surprised her.

"... Is that...?"

"A lightsaber," Aliana nodded, "I've read somewhere that lightsabers carry impressions of the people who wielded them. That might have been what you were hearing."

"Really?" Rey asked tilting her head. As little sense as it made, she was definitely hearing something coming from that lightsaber. Rey took a deep breath and reached out to it, her fingers barely touching the hilt before her mind suddenly flashed with loud words and imagery.

"Kill him... Kill him now..."

"He's manipulating you!"

"There are too many of them! What are we going to do?"

"I don't know you anymore..."

"I wasn't prepared to train someone like you!"

"You were my brother, Anakin!"

"You are beaten! It is useless to resist!"

The suddenness and intensity of the flashes made a scream tear from Rey's throat as she stumbled back from the lightsaber and fell against Aliana.

"Whoa!" Aliana caught her and held her steady, laying a hand on Rey's cheek, "Rey, what happened?"

Rey was breathing heavily and staring at the chest. She wasn't quite sure what she'd heard, or even if it was real. But she knew that she definitely didn't want to touch that weapon again. "I heard things. I could almost see things," she explained, "I don't know what happened."

"See things? Maybe... perhaps they were memories?" Aliana suggested, trying to not sound sure of what she knew was an absolute certainty. She held Rey steady, helping her stay up straight. "Was there anything that stuck out to you?"

“No, I didn’t recognize any of them,” Rey shook her head, “I don’t even know how I could hear them.”

“Well... if I could propose a theory,” Aliana said carefully, trying hard to sound like she was guessing, “Perhaps you’re Force Sensitive? I’ve heard stories of Jedi learning things by touching objects...”

Rey’s brow furrowed. “Force Sensitive?” she asked incredulously before shaking her head again. “... No, that can’t be!”

“Yes it can,” came Maz’s voice from behind the two.

Aliana turned around, holding Rey up by the shoulders, as she stared Maz down, “How long were you standing there?!”

“Long enough,” Maz said, almost dismissing Aliana as she walked over to Rey. “This isn’t just any lightsaber, my dear. This is the lightsaber of legends, and now it is yours.”

Rey’s face contorted into one of confusion and discomfort. “What!?”

“That lightsaber was Luke’s,” Maz explained, a look of wonder on her face, “And his father’s before him. And now... it calls to you.”

Aliana glanced back at the chest, wondering why a single lightsaber would be so special.

Rey pinched the bridge of her nose. “That... that doesn’t make sense! It’s a weapon! Weapon’s can’t call out to anyone!”

“The weapon of a Jedi is strong in the Force,” Maz explained. “As are you. This weapon is calling you to your destiny.”

“Desti-No!” Rey cut herself off and shook her head, “No, I touched a lightsaber just a few days ago and I didn’t hear screaming or children dying!”

‘Children dying?’ Aliana thought to herself in confusion before clarity dawned on her. “You said this belonged to Luke’s father, yes?”

Maz nodded while Rey looked at her, unsure as to what her point was.

“When Anakin Skywalker became Darth Vader, he hunted down and slaughtered almost every Jedi in the galaxy,” Aliana explained. “More than a few of which, were children.”

Rey looked as though she was about to vomit.

“Why did you keep it?” Aliana asked as she turned to Maz, “Doesn’t Skywalker have his own lightsaber now?”

“This lightsaber has been waiting for a new champion to wield it into battle. To bring peace, freedom, justice and security to the galaxy once more.” Maz continued. “It has waited for years, and at long last it has found you, dear.”

Aliana held Rey tightly by the shoulders, looking at Maz warily. That Maz believed a lightsaber could think and feel was strange to say the least. She knew that Jedi liked to use Force Sensitive

crystals in their lightsabers which gave them certain properties, but she had personally never bothered with them. It wasn't too outrageous for the crystal in Anakin's lightsaber to be calling out through the Force, but the reverence Maz put on a replaceable weapon...

She made sure Rey could stand on her own and then released her, "Rey? Do you want to take it?"

"Of course not!" Rey exclaimed, not so much angry with Aliana as she was with this situation. "Whatever that thing is, it's evil and I want no part of it!"

"Rey-" Maz began.

"I will not use a weapon that has murdered children!" Rey shot back.

She made to leave, but was stopped when Aliana grabbed her hand. She turned back and felt that alien surge of hatred toward her flare up inside her again.

"Let go, Alie," she hissed, "I can't be here!"

Aliana looked at her, her overwhelming worry and concern for the increasingly distraught girl evident on her face. But she obliged and let go of her hand, "Alright."

Rey's glare softened and she rubbed her hand. Aliana had a very firm grip, especially when she was worried, "Thank you." She took off out of the storeroom and down the corridor, looking to get out of here as quickly as possible.

"Wait, child!" Maz called out, only for Aliana to grab her shoulder.

"Don't. She's been through enough," the Sith said firmly.

Maz looked up at Aliana before lifting her large spectacles away from her eyes. "You care about that one," she noted.

"Very much so," Aliana replied.

"Yet you have not told her the truth?"

Aliana looked out to the corridor that Rey had disappeared through, "...No, I haven't."

"Lord Amorosa, if that girl deserves your affection then she most certainly deserves your honesty," Maz said quietly, laying a hand on Aliana's.

Aliana looked down at the floor. She'd been stalling out of fear for too long. The longer she waited, the longer she lied, the more damage the truth would do. It may already be irreparable, but that was a chance that Aliana was going to have to take. Almost immediately, her thoughts were interrupted by a powerful feeling of imminent danger. The kind of which she'd felt on Jakku just before...

"Oh no..." she said, letting go of Maz and grabbing Anakin's lightsaber before taking off down the corridor, "The First Order is coming!"

She barely got those words out before she felt the castle rumble from their immediate assault. Despite the quake, she remained on course as she bolted to the outside of the castle, dodging past panicked patrons and falling debris on her way to the exit. Han and Finn met up with her as she made it into the courtyard to see Stormtroopers coming over the hillside.

“Where’s Rey?” Finn demanded.

“She took off, we’ll find her later,” Aliana said, though something in her gut told her that would be a very complicated task indeed. She held out Anakin’s lightsaber to Finn and drew her own, “Ready for the big leagues?”

Finn stared wide-eyed at the weapon before taking it. He looked at Aliana and after a brief moment to center himself, he nodded. He took a stance that the Sith had taught him in their sparring sessions and with a press of the ignition, a blue blade of light unsheathed from the hilt in his hands.

Aliana activated her own lightsaber and didn’t waste any time admiring the blade as she charged toward the Stormtroopers. No more restraint, no more clever stealth. Today was all about unleashing her wrath.

Rey made it out and into the forest at a sprint, running up a small hill that overlooked the castle. It was then that she saw the Stormtroopers descend on the castle in droves as the small handful of pirates and smugglers scrambled to get a defensive position. She stopped and scanned the courtyard for her friends, and saw Han and Chewie take positions behind a wall while Aliana handed something to Finn.

Then her heart stopped when she saw Aliana draw and activate her lightsaber. The lightsaber that was supposed to be derelict. Instead, it ignited a crimson blade and she charged into the fray with blinding speed. As Rey witnessed the utter carnage that Aliana left in her wake, the pieces began clicking into place. The lightsaber, her imperial ship, her impeccable combat skills, the fact that her mother was killed by a Jedi Master. They were no coincidence.

Aliana was a Sith Lord.

Rey trembled with feelings she couldn’t put into words. Hurt, disgust, betrayal, they didn’t feel strong enough for what she was feeling. Aliana had been lying to her from the moment they met. All of her shaky stories that Rey had shrugged off without thinking about them, all the slip-ups, 2V calling her ‘Darth’, Aliana had lied about every single one of them. She could only wonder just what else she had been lying about. Did she care about her at all? And if not, what was her ploy?

Then a horrifying thought crossed her mind. She was the one who told Aliana where the Resistance base was, after BB-8 had told her. She had nearly delivered a Sith Lord to the Resistance. Had Aliana simply been using her to get to them? Had all of this been some clever ruse?

Before she could question herself any further, she felt a flash of danger and her head snapped to the east. She could see someone, something, cutting through the trees.

As the nearest bit of forest was cut down before her, Rey finally saw him. The masked, hooded figure that had fought Aliana on the Fury. He faced her direction, the red lightsaber he held suddenly pointed at her. Acting on instinct, Rey drew the small blaster pistol that Han had given her and began shooting. Her face contorted in anger and misery as each of her shots were parried by the masked figure. After a moment, she couldn’t move her trigger finger. She couldn’t move anything, at all. She was frozen in place, only able to move what the Dark Jedi wished to move. Fear flooded her system as with a wave of his hand, she was brought to her knees.

Kylo Ren approached her and stooped down to look her in the eye, “The Sith’s apprentice. Your Master isn’t around to save you this time,” he sneered, bringing the blade of his lightsaber to Rey’s

neck, “The map, and your Master’s plans. Now.”

“I... I don’t,” Rey stammered hard. She couldn’t piece a single thought together. There was too much going on in her mind at once. She could barely register the instrument of death being held inches from her neck. It was all she could do to keep from sobbing, though she might have guessed a tear or two fell down her cheek.

“The map!” Kylo Ren snarled, grabbing Rey by the neck of her tunic, “And your Master’s plans!”

“M-Master? What Master?” was all Rey could say.

Kylo Ren only growled in frustration and kicked Rey in the stomach, causing her to double over in agony. He brought his lightsaber dangerously close to her skull, preventing her from getting up without killing herself.

“I’m not really in a patient mood, so you can either give me the information I need, or I can rip it out of your skull myself,” he seethed.

Rey could do little more than whine in pain and fear. Even if she had any information to give to this monster, she could barely form coherent words. After a moment of stifled whimpering she took a deep breath and tried to explain.

“I... I don’t have...” she managed before another sob threatened to tear itself from her throat.

“I don’t have time for this!” Ren yelled as he waved his hand over Rey’s head. Almost immediately, Rey felt her entire world go black as she was put into a Force-induced sleep. He hefted her over his shoulder and stomped off toward his shuttle. He would simply pull the knowledge out of her back on the base if that was what it was going to take.

He pulled out his holocom and an image of Captain Phasma appeared before him, “Tell the Supreme Leader I have the Sith’s apprentice.”

Though the elation of giving the riot trooper his due karma was something Aliana was all too delighted to feed on, her fury was broken when a sudden wave of overpowering fear and pain washed over her. She looked over at Finn, who had the same look on his face that she did. She was confused as to the source, until she realized that a particular bright light in the Force had gone out. As she looked around, her heart stopped when she noticed Kylo Ren hauling Rey onto a shuttle.

She pulled Finn to his feet and the two of them tore off after the shuttle, but they didn’t get close enough before it took off into the air. Aliana reached out to grab it and keep it from flying away, but just as her hand reached the apex they jumped into Hyperspace.

“NO!” Aliana screamed.

“REY!” Finn yelled.

For the first time in her life, Aliana was lost on what to do.

Despite the shuttle’s retreat, the First Order’s attack did not let up. Turbo lasers littered the terrain with explosions. Stormtroopers deployed platoon after platoon, closing in on their location. Aliana

simply stood there, mind shrouded in uncertainty, almost incapable of hearing Finn scream at her to move.

She felt a blaster bolt strike her shoulder, but she was too lost in herself to notice.

It was then that Aliana felt something else. A familiar presence. Something that was just notable enough to snap her out of her stupor. She lifted her gaze up slightly to see an X wing fly by, a whole squadron of fighters following suit. Aliana only paid them half attention as she walked around the battlefield, absently cutting down Stormtroopers.

As the fighters pulled in, they unleashed a barrage of fire onto the First Order, cutting through twice as many as the two saber-wielders on the ground.

“Come in for another run!” Poe yelled into his com, “Get a perimeter around those four!”

As the fighters laid down their cover, the attention was drawn away from the bombers that had just unleashed their assault on the destroyer that was occupied with trying to shoot down the squadron. Explosions blossomed all over the large cruiser, prompting it to lose power and crash into a nearby mountain.

Finn had a look of relief on his face as the Resistance fired on the Stormtroopers. Aliana was still in her daze. Her lightsaber fell to her side as her mind drifted to what she had done. She’d let Rey run off without following her. If she’d followed her, she could have stopped Ren from capturing her. Now Rey had been taken who knows where to be subjected to who knows what and it was her fault.

She barely even registered when the transports landed and General Leia stepped out. She was paying attention just enough to follow Finn and Han to meet the general, her lightsaber still active at her side.

Han appeared as if he was about to say something to Leia before a golden protocol droid stepped in his way. “General Solo! What a pleasure it is to see you again! Surely you remember me? C-3P0?”

Leia looked at the two and smiled. Her eyes then fell onto Finn, who was looking all over the place, the presence of the Resistance all around him keeping his gaze wandering in every direction. It was then that Leia turned her attention to Aliana. Finally on the same planet, a few meters away from each other, Leia could only note that the Sith’s presence felt... different from what she had expected.

Aliana finally gathered herself enough to look up and direct her attention to Leia, “It’s uh... it’s nice to meet you, general,” she said, holding out her free hand, “I’m Darth Amorosa.”

Leia kept her expression neutral, her eyes darting over to Han momentarily, who simply offered a shrug, before she accepted Aliana’s hand. “Hello, Darth Amorosa,” she said plainly. “Welcome to the Resistance.”

“Kid, you alright?” Han asked, tilting his head as he looked at Aliana.

Aliana shook her head, letting go of Leia’s hand, “Kylo Ren took Rey, and I wasn’t there to stop him...”

Han and Leia were silent for a moment. “We’ll get her back, Kid. Don’t you worry.”

“First thing’s first, we high tail it back to base,” Leia said before leaning into her comm. “Captain Dameron, mission accomplished. Get your butt back to D’Qar!”

“10-4 General!” Poe said through the filter of comm static.

The legion of fighters ascended out of the atmosphere and took off into deep space as Leia took BB-8 onto the transport with her troops. Aliana, Han and Finn were left to return to their respective ships and follow them to D’Qar. As they headed out toward the clearing they’d left their ships in, Han and Finn couldn’t stop noticing how... listless Aliana was.

Finn had been just as distraught when he’d seen Rey being taken onto the shuttle, but something inside him had pushed that fear down. It was still there, but it felt covered by a sheet of glass. It let him concentrate. Aliana, however, seemed to be frozen in a state of panic.

“Kid, I meant what I said,” Han told her, laying a hand on her shoulder and bringing her to a stop, “She’ll be back safe and sound before you know it.”

“It’s my fault...”

“You couldn’t have known what would happen,” Han said.

“Knowing what will happen is literally one of my powers!” Aliana snapped back. “She was my friend! My responsibility! I could have kept her safe, but I didn’t and now she’s gone!”

Han wasn’t frightened or put off by Aliana’s sudden explosion. He simply kept his hand on her shoulder. “They took her alive, and she’s made of tough stuff,” Han offered. “Whatever they took her for, she’ll last long enough for us to reach her.”

“But they wouldn’t have taken her if I hadn’t let her go,” Aliana said, her eyes brimming with tears, “I should have followed her, I should have stayed with her, I shouldn’t have let her just run off.” She clutched at her own sides as she started to visibly tremble. The thought of what the First Order might be doing to her because of her negligence was like an icy knife in her chest.

Han, not really knowing how to reassure Aliana that she wasn’t to blame, did about the only thing he could think of. He pulled Aliana into a hug. The Sith winced for a moment, before relaxing and wrapping her arms around him, finally breaking down and sobbing.

Han remained quiet as he held her. He didn’t need to say anything else. He knew she would make this right. He knew she would save her. If there was one thing he learned, it’s that when there’s someone who loves you, they will move heaven and earth to save you from harm. He was lucky enough to have someone like that for him.

And now, so did Rey.

Chapter End Notes

If you enjoyed this chapter, leave a comment explaining why. Free content thrives on interaction and feedback.

Stay Back, Sith

Chapter Notes

6/7/21 - This chapter has been updated to slightly better reflect Finn's character, as well as better reflect Leia's hostility toward the Sith.

Finn stepped off the Falcon in a daze as he looked around the Resistance base. It was small, but the entire compound teemed with energy as Resistance fighters ran back and forth carrying supplies and datapads to each individual building. He couldn't even tell which grass-covered bunker was which as he followed the general flow of people. The entire last few hours had been a complete daze and he was still processing everything. The First Order attack, Rey being kidnapped-

Oh kriff, Rey! She was in the heart of the First Order now, at Kylo Ren's mercy. He'd almost forgotten on the flight there with everything else. Starkiller base, the plans to destroy the Republic, it was all rushing past him and he couldn't focus on anything. After almost two weeks of worrying and fretting over where he was going to go, it looked like the First Order had made the decision for him. Fear or no fear, he wasn't about to leave Rey on Starkiller Base to be tortured.

Something struck his leg and he looked down to see BB-8 rolling past him toward one of the X-Wing fighters that had escorted them and toward the pilot getting out of the cockpit. As he got closer, he beeped happily at Poe Dameron, excited to see he was alive. Finn was wide eyed at the sight. Acting entirely on reflex, he was running over to the two of them. Poe caught the motion from the corner of his eye and upon looking up, realized who it was and began running towards him as well.

"Buddy!" he called out.

"Poe Dameron?! You're alive?!"

The two men collided with each other in a hug. Finn felt a smile plastered on his face that was mirrored by Poe's

"It's great to see you!" Poe exclaimed happily.

"I can't believe it!" Finn responded. "How!? The crash!"

"I don't know exactly, I woke up in a medbay but then some droid put me back to sleep. When I came to I was in a safehouse out from Jakku saying that a Sith had brought me back," Poe explained, "But BB-8 says that you saved him?"

"Yeah, Rey and I found him on-" Finn paused. "Wait, you mean Aliana!? She saved you!?"

BB-8 let out a series of bewildered chirps, equally surprised.

"Is that her name? She wouldn't tell me," Poe shrugged, gently hitting Finn's shoulder, "But you and... who's Rey? You two saved BB-8?"

“Rey was a scavenger we found on Jakku with BB-8.” Finn explained “She came with us to Takodana, but Kylo Ren kidnapped her when the First Order attacked! We don’t know what he wants with her, but we have to get her back!”

“That’s the girl the Sith mentioned,” Poe recalled, though Amorosa hadn’t actually given them names to go on, “The one who’s strong in the Force? I think I know who you’re talking about. Come with me, you need to talk to the general.”

Finn nodded and followed Poe’s lead. Every step he took was one of conviction. Whatever happened, he knew that getting Rey back was important. He knew that Aliana would agree, given how hard she took losing her. Whatever plan they came up with, that had to be their priority. He glanced behind him to see Aliana slowly coming down her ship’s exit ramp, clutching her sides and staring at the ground. Satisfied that she was coming at least, he turned back to follow Poe down into what looked like a large control room. The noise of everyone talking in different conversations at once made it hard to get a bearing on where he was going, so he kept his eyes focused on the back of Poe’s head as he led him deeper inside the bunker to where the General was speaking two other men.

“General Organa,” Poe called out, gesturing to the other two, “I’m sorry to interrupt. This is Finn, he needs to talk to you.”

Leia turned from the men she was speaking to to face Finn and Poe. Approaching them, she put on a fond smile. “Hello, Finn. I’m glad we have a chance to finally meet. Captain Dameron has spoken very highly of you. That was a very brave thing you did, renouncing the First Order, saving this man’s life.”

“Thank you, General, but it wasn’t just me. There were two others,” Finn responded politely, nodding his head. “And that’s my problem. The First Order has kidnapped my friend.”

“Han told me about the girl,” Leia nodded, recalling the aftermath of the Takodana assault. “We’ll try to bring her back if we can.”

“But they took her alive,” Finn stressed. “And Aliana believes that Rey is strong in the Force.”

Leia arched a brow at the unfamiliar name.

“The Sith,” Poe clarified.

Something tightened in Leia’s expression. Finn and Poe could both see her tense considerably despite her efforts to remain poised. Poe had seen the General like this before, but only when she was especially worked up about something. A part of him could understand that, given the Sith’s reputation in the core worlds. However, he couldn’t help but be surprised just how intensely it seemed to get to her. It was already clear that Aliana was on their side, wasn’t it?

“Right,” Leia remarked. “That makes sense.”

Poe turned his attention from Leia to Finn. “So you think the First Order captured her for her connection to the Force?”

“Maybe, I don’t know,” Finn admitted with a shameful shrug. “All I know is that she’s not safe with them.”

“You’re right, she isn’t,” came Aliana’s voice.

Everyone turned around to see her running in, her eyes still red from her earlier bout of crying. She was still taking Rey’s capture extremely personally and blaming herself for it. Despite the reassurances of both Finn and Han that she wasn’t to blame, she still couldn’t really accept it. She couldn’t stop wondering if she’d led someone else to die at her expense. “There’s no doubt that Jedi has sensed her strength in the Force,” she explained. “Rey lights up like a landing zone and even a basic Padawan like Kylo Ren could sense it.”

“So she’s like... really powerful?” Finn grimaced.

“Unnaturally powerful,” Aliana explained. “There’s something going on besides just being an exceptional Force User, but I’m not certain what. No doubt they’re trying to turn her into a weapon at this very moment.”

“Will that power help protect her?” Poe inquired. “I mean, I’m not quite sure how the Force works, but I feel like it should at least give her a fighting chance.”

“It’s not enough to simply have the Force, Commander Dameron,” Leia chided. “You must understand how to use it. Otherwise, you’ll fall prey to the Dark Side. And those who use it.” She accentuated that point by glaring warily at Aliana.

“Okay so Rey’s in a vulnerable position,” Poe nodded.

“And we need to get her out of there,” Aliana explained. “While I doubt Kylo Ren could do much, the Dark Jedi who trains him could do a lot to hurt Rey. We can’t let that happen.”

“Do you know where they might have taken her?” Leia asked.

Finn nodded, “Starkiller Base. It’s a hyper-lightspeed weapon built into the side of Ilum. It can destroy an entire star system in one shot.”

Leia, Poe and the few people around them all suddenly bore looks of horror at Finn’s words. There was a general air of unease surrounding the room and murmurs of panic from the few stragglers who had overheard. “...What did you just say?” Leia asked. She’d heard it, but she couldn’t believe it.

“It’s a planet sized superweapon that they’ve been working on in secret for years,” Finn said. “It’s intended to usher in the First Order’s rise to power with a show of force that could eclipse the Death Star.”

“...Oh, Kriff,” Poe cursed, a cold bead of sweat trickling down the side of his head.

Leia grabbed another Resistance member by the arm. “Get a reconnaissance flight out to Ilum and bring me back as much information about that weapon as you possibly can. Billions of lives are now at stake!”

“This only means we need to get out to Ilum as fast as possible,” Aliana added. “That weapon needs to be destroyed and Rey needs to be retrieved.”

“We need to know everything we can about it, first,” Leia said. “How close it is to completion. How heavily guarded it is. If we try flying in blind, we’ll only cause more problems.”

“I can give you specifics,” Finn insisted, stepping forward. “I’ve been stationed on that base before. I know it’s inner workings.”

“You can work with our engineers while the ships are out scouting,” Leia nodded as she started directing everyone. “Poe, get your squad out immediately! Han, I need all the sensor data from the Falcon! Finn, get over here with Paige, she’ll take down everything you say.”

The three of them nodded and moved to carry out Leia’s orders. Poe was the one to pause and look at Aliana. “What are you gonna do during all this?” he asked. “This sounds like a good a time as any to have a Sith on our side.”

“I’ll be on the ground when it’s time to assault,” Aliana assured him. “Until then, I just have to wait. My lightsaber isn’t much good from space.”

“Fair enough,” Poe nodded, nearly about to utter a farewell before he noted the look on Aliana’s face. Nervousness she was trying her best to conceal but was seeping through nonetheless. He placed a hand on her shoulder, prompting her to meet his eyes. “...You gonna be okay?”

“...Yeah,” she said, brushing his hand off her shoulder and schooling her features even harder. Friendly or not, this was not a safe place for her to come undone. “Please don’t touch me.”

“Oh. My bad,” Poe said apologetically, placing his hand back to his side. “Well, the scouts and I will be back soon with what we find. Shouldn’t be too hard to get in and out so long as we’re quick.” He studied her a moment longer, watching her response to his words carefully before adding, “We’ll get her back.”

Aliana couldn’t help the weak smile that broke out on her lips. “...Thank you.”

Rey bolted back into consciousness and tried to sit upright, only to realize that she couldn’t get very far. She glanced down at her hands and feet to see that she was fastened to what looked like an examination table, tilted at an angle. She looked up and almost screamed at the sight of the masked figure standing in front of her.

“...Where am I?” she demanded.

“You’re in my custody,” Kylo Ren answered, the deep distortion of his mask echoing slightly throughout the room. “That’s all you need to know.” He stepped closer to the table Rey was strapped to. “What I need to know is where the map to Skywalker is and what your master’s plans are. Tell me, or this gets bad for you.”

“I don’t know what Master you’re talking about,” Rey glared up at him, her hands shaking in fear, “And even if I did I wouldn’t tell some creature in a mask.”

Kylo was silent for a moment before he lifted both hands to the side of his head. The mouthpiece of the mask extended outward slightly, allowing him to remove his helmet. The unmasking revealed the face of a human, skin an almost sickly pale and irises almost as dark as his black hair. Rey’s only thought was that Aliana had been right. ‘Grease stain’ was the perfect word to describe him.

“You are right to be scared,” Kylo said plainly. “I’m more powerful than you could possibly imagine.” It was then he extended a gloved hand, reaching out with the Force and touching Rey’s mind.

Immediately, Rey felt something force its way into her mind. At first it hurt, but then she felt an agony like no other as she felt this invasive force burrow into her thoughts and open every door it possibly could. She could feel her mind being drained of as much information as possible as the Dark Jedi recklessly rifled through every single thought, memory and fleeting feeling she had ever had in her life.

“I can see them,” she heard him say, “The traitor and the Sith. You’re afraid the traitor will leave and that you’ll never see him again. And the Sith... is conflicted. I can see affection, anger, and betrayal. You don’t know how to feel about her anymore...”

“Get out of my head,” Rey said through gritted teeth. She hated how close to whimpering she sounded just then. She hated feeling so vulnerable in front of this... creature. She hated how she winced every time he pushed his power further into the cracks in her mind.

“I see the old smuggler,” he said, a hint of disdain in his voice. “You looked upon him fondly. Saw something of a father in him. ... He would have disappointed you. He could never replace the parents who abandoned you.”

“Shut up!” she shouted.

Kylo Ren backed away from her and circled around the table, “I know you’ve seen the map, and I know you know what the Sith’s plans are.”

“I haven’t seen either,” Rey hissed, trying to hold back tears, “I didn’t even know she was a Sith.”

“A likely story. And now you’ll give me what I want,” he said, reaching his hand out again.

Rey felt the Force burrow into her mind again and squeezed her eyes shut, trying hard to clamp down on her mind and keep him out. Then, she briefly remembered Aliana suggesting that she was Force sensitive. She’d dismissed it, but... she was a Sith. She would know. She turned her head back and looked Kylo Ren in the eye, “I’m not giving you anything,” she said, trying in her mind to reverse-engineer what he was doing to her like she did starship components. Her mind focused on that idea, picturing this connection of their minds as some sort of device. Something that could be created, destroyed or reverse engineered. Almost instantly, it began to work, every surge of his power was met with a dampener. Every crack he attempted to invade was covered in encasing. She saw as Kylo’s expression gradually became one of struggling. He pushed harder and harder, but now she understood. She could practically see the power between this connection course through the circuitry.

And now she could reverse the flow of power.

Taking a gambit, she began peering into his mind. Immediately, she saw something. An image as clear before her as this grease ball of a man. A black dais supporting a ruined, tattered, ash white helmet. She knew to whom that destroyed mask belonged to and she could feel all the emotions he felt towards it. “You’re afraid,” she said plainly. She pushed harder and could see Aliana’s face, glaring dismissively as she held his lightsaber arm aloft. This was a memory she had actually seen. A little further, and she could see a twisted monstrosity of a man glaring down and talking about what a failure he was. “You’re afraid that you’ll never be as strong as Darth Vader. That you’ll be replaced. That Amorosa will kill you.”

Kylo Ren stepped back, severing the connection. He was visibly shaken, withdrawn hand brought back and trembling. This wasn’t how this was supposed to go. She was supposed to helplessly give

him the information he needed. He would have coaxed and molded her mind into his personal puppet. He would use her to destroy the Sith. This wasn't right.

He walked around the table and exited the room without another word, walking quickly through the halls to put more distance between her and him.

"The reconnaissance flight confirmed Finn's report," Poe explained as the entire Resistance stood around the holoterminal, "Starkiller Base is active and the weapon is charging as we speak."

There was a quiet murmur among the crowd before Admiral Ackbar spoke up, "How is it possible to power a weapon of that size?"

"It uses the power of the Sun," Finn explained, highlighting the hydrogen processor on the northern pole of the planet. "As the weapon is charged, the Sun is drained."

"What's the range on that thing!? What's the maximum output!?" A distressed Resistance Fighter asked.

"Depends on how long they decide to charge it," Finn continued. "A full charge could wipe out the Hosnian system in a single barrage."

"Did recon give us any intel on how we can destroy it?" Poe asked. "There's gotta be a way to knock it out."

"For the weapon to contain that much power, there must be some kind of thermal oscillator," one Commander suggested.

"Right here," Finn said, pointing at the holo-diagram, "Precinct 47, here." The holoterminal highlighted a device that ran down deep into the core of the planet.

"If we can destroy that oscillator, it might destabilize the core and cripple the weapon," the Commander continued, "Maybe even the planet."

"We go in there, we hit that oscillator with everything we've got," Poe nodded, "But the only problem is the planetary shields. Fighters can't get through barricades that strong."

"Then we'll disable the shields," Han said, looking at Finn, "You worked there, what do you got?"

Finn bit his lip as his brain wracked for an idea. "... I used to do... maintenance in that precinct. I know the layout. If we can land on the planet without being detected, I can get us inside."

"Alright then," Leia said. "We'll have a ground team to disable the shields and a strike team to blow that weapon to hell after we do."

"Sounds familiar," Han said with a cheeky grin.

"There's just one snag," the Commander who mentioned the oscillator spoke up, hitting a few buttons on the holoterminal. Starkiller Base was instead replaced by a holo-image of Kylo Ren, "According to recon, there's a hostile Jedi Padawan on the station. If he senses either of you at any point, this entire mission goes up in smoke. And even a Padawan is still deadly."

“I can deal with that,” Aliana spoke up, drawing the attention of everyone in the room, “There’s an old Sith technique to cloak a small ship in the Dark Side of the Force. It’ll make the Falcon virtually undetectable to anyone except a Sith of Anakin Skywalker’s strength. Once we’re inside, I can kill the Jedi while Finn and Han disable the shields.”

Leia frowned at that. “This is an extraction and sabotage mission,” she said firmly. “Do not confront Kylo Ren unless you have no other choice. It will only complicate matters.”

Aliana narrowed her eyes at Leia. “It won’t be a matter of choice. The Jedi is the only truly dangerous element on the base. He won’t let his prey go easily. Finding Rey means finding him.”

Leia looked far from convinced. Rather, she simply looked irritated. “Destroying that weapon is the highest priority of this mission, Lord Amorosa,” she said with a slight huff. “I am willing to amend the plan to help you extract your friend, but not your bloodlust for Jedi. Focus on what is actually important.”

“Bloodlust?!” Aliana balked. “That man attacked my friends! He practically leads the First Order! The hell are you talking about bloodlust?!”

“If you can’t abide by these conditions, then you best be on your way, Sith,” Leia sneered, folding her arms. “I’m risking enough by letting you be here. Perhaps you should remember whose base you’re currently on before you start kicking up a stink.”

Aliana glanced at Finn. “You’re seeing this too, right?”

Finn nodded before speaking up. “General, if we have a chance to take out a high ranking member of the First Order, we should take it.”

“We’re trying to take out a hyper lightspeed superweapon as well,” Leia countered. “If we have to choose between taking out one or the other, I would go with the one that is currently at risk of destroying entire star systems. Kylo Ren is not the priority here. Get in, get your friend, shut down the shields, get out. Stick to the plan. I don’t see why this is hard.”

“With all due respect, General,” one technician spoke up. “Amorosa was specifically talking about distracting and dispatching Kylo Ren long enough for everyone else to do their jobs.”

Leia blinked, turning her head to scowl at the technician, but offering no verbal retort. A moment later, she turned her attention to Han, her gaze expectant.

Han grimaced slightly before speaking up. “If we’re gonna have a chance to pull this off, we’re gonna have to be flexible,” he said with a slight shrug. “If Ren is there, we’ll... deal with him. If not, we just worry about Rey and the shields.”

Aliana nodded in agreement. “My thoughts exactly.”

Leia’s mouth became a thin line, clearly perturbed by the idea but unable to voice why without derailing the entire briefing. “... Very well,” she said. “Darth Amorosa will join Han and Finn planet-side. Any other questions?”

Everyone looked around at the room, seeing no other questions, comments or concerns being raised.

“Then we move. Now,” Leia said. “May the Force be with us all.”

Everyone broke apart and headed for their individual stations. Han and Finn turned away for the Falcon, and Aliana moved to follow her when a hand reached out and seized her by the arm, yanking her back. Aliana felt an initial surge of panic and her hand darted to her lightsaber before she realized it was Leia. Glaring at her. Her hand stayed on her lightsaber. “Yes?”

“Let us get one thing straight here, Sith,” Leia hissed. “If you are hoping to operate with the Resistance, you should know better than to question my authority in the middle of an assembly like this. If you can’t handle that, then you shouldn’t be here.”

Aliana yanked her arm out of Leia’s grip. “Let’s get one thing straight here, Jedi. The First Order took my friend. I’m going to get her back no matter what it takes. So your authority doesn’t mean anything to me. I don’t take orders from you, I’m here because circumstance forced me to be here. Had Rey not been captured, I’d have given you your damn droid, taken my friends, and been on my way. But that didn’t happen. So until I have her back, you’re stuck with me whether you like it or not.”

“I assure you, I do not like the idea of delivering this girl into the hands of a Sith one little bit,” Leia bit back. “And if you think I’m going to help this girl escape the First Order just so you can make a weapon of her instead, you have another thing coming.”

Aliana was positively disgusted. This Jedi was swinging for her out of the gate, just like her brother. “That’s not just a Force Sensitive out there, Jedi! That’s my friend! That’s someone I care very deeply for. So back off before I make you.”

Leia scoffed, rolling her eyes. “Save the melodrama for someone who will buy it,” she said dismissively. “You’re only here because you stand to serve our cause. Not because I actually believe the slag coming out of your despicable mouth. Whatever this girl’s deal is, she deserves better than to have her life utterly ruined by some half baked Sith. She’d be better off dying on Ilum than she’d be with you.”

Aliana balked at the sheer amount of vitriol Organa was spewing. She expected to encounter suspicion given her alignment, but this was on a whole different level than what she was used to. It actually... hurt. “What the hell is up your ass?”

“I know better than to trust a Sith,” Leia said matter of factly. “You may have convinced the others you’re not a threat, but I won’t be suckered in that easily.”

“It’s not about trust, Jedi,” Aliana scowled. “I got Rey into this mess, I’m getting her out.”

Before Leia could respond, Han stuck his head back into the war room, beckoning to Aliana. “Kid! C’mon. We’re prepped to leave, we’re just waiting on you. You want to save your girl or what?”

Aliana turned to look at Han, then back at Leia. There was more that she wanted to say to this self important, has-been politician. Much, much more. But... Rey took priority. “I’m coming!” she said, making her way to door after Han. She didn’t give Leia a single word of farewell. She didn’t owe her one.

As the two of them made their way out toward the hangars, Poe ran up alongside them and smiled at Aliana. “I just wanted to thank you in person for saving me, Finn, and BB-8,” he said, “You helped salvage my mission and we’d be sitting ducks if it wasn’t for you.”

“There’s no thanks necessary, Captain Dameron,” Aliana shook her head, “I was the one who screwed it up in the first place. I was just correcting my mistake. And now I’m about to go correct two more.” She nodded to Poe and turned to continue when she stopped and an idea came to her, “Captain, you’re a good pilot right?”

Poe turned to look at Aliana again. “I’m definitely a fast pilot,” he replied. “Why do you ask?”

“There’s a Sith Warship sitting in the eastern docking bay,” Aliana explained, “It has a lot of heavy weapons on board. Guns, turbolasers, missiles, the whole damn party. If you can fly it, it’ll make blasting that planet a hell of a lot easier.”

Poe’s eyes widened with surprise. “You... want me to fly your ship on the strike mission?”

“Who better to do so than the captain?” Aliana asked with an easy smile. “Besides, the First Order is so desperate to replicate the ‘glory’ of the Empire. Destroying their plans with a relic of the era they idolize has a certain poetic justice to it, wouldn’t you say?”

An almost wicked grin spreads across Poe’s face. “Absolutely, Lord Amorosa.”

Aliana nodded, “Good. May the Force serve you well, Captain.”

“Yet again, you come before me a failure,” Snoke said as he looked down on Kylo Ren, “You couldn’t even break into the mind of a girl with no training in the Force. A girl so distracted she couldn’t tell her companion was Sith. What a waste of blood you are.”

“The Force is strong with her!” Ren said in an attempt to defend himself. “The Sith! She... she must have prepared her mind for this without anyone knowing. Weaponized her somehow. I can still get the information we need! I can still turn her to our cause! I just need more time!”

“Time is something we don’t have,” Hux interrupted before turning his attention to Snoke. “Supreme Leader. Our scouts reported Resistance activity near the planet. A reconnaissance force. It seems they know about StarKiller base and it’s capabilities now.” Hux tilted his head in Kylo’s direction and sneered. “As if someone had led them here.”

“It was the traitor. FN-2187,” Kylo Ren growled.

Snoke rolled his eyes, “How long until the weapon is charged?”

“Six hours at the most, Supreme Leader,” Hux said, nervous at how this would anger Snoke.

“Fortify the weapon’s defenses and prepare for an assault,” Snoke ordered, “From this point on, you are in command of Starkiller Base, General Hux. Now leave me to deal with this failure.”

“Thank you Supreme Leader,” Hux said with a bow. “I won’t let you down.” With that, the admiral turned on his heels and left the room. Kylo was left alone with the projected image of Snoke looming over him. Even as a hologram being sent from light-years away, he felt helpless under his master’s gaze.

“You have failed at every stage of this mission,” Snoke said plainly. “All because you refuse to acknowledge the Sith as your superior. She will come for the girl you know. Your slight against her will be answered for in your blood. You will fall before her and this entire operation will crumble

and burn as a result of your incompetence!” The Supreme Leader all but roared at Kylo as he continued. “...I’m sending your fellow Knights to deal with the Sith, while you finish what you started and take care of the girl. You will not engage the Sith when she arrives. Is that clear?”

Kylo Ren looked up at Snoke, his hands twitching with rage, “Yes, Supreme Leader.”

Snoke knew that Ren had absolutely no intention of listening to him, but at the very least the Sith would be taken care of even if Ren was killed in the process. He shut off the holoterminal, and left Kylo Ren alone in the cavern. He was going to be in need of a new apprentice soon, and this girl would be an ideal candidate.

Kylo Ren turned and walked out of the cavern. A plan of action slowly but surely formed in his mind, but the first order of business was dealing with the girl. Being humiliated by the Sith was one thing, but this scavenging nobody was not going to get the better of him. This he swore.

“How long until we reach Starkiller Base?” Aliana asked as she stood in the cockpit doorway. The longer this took, the more tense she became. She needed a distraction. Something to occupy her time.

“About an hour,” Han answered, “We’ll be coming in for a rough landing so we’ll need you ready.”

“I can do that,” Aliana nodded, laying a hand on Finn’s shoulder. “You still have Skywalker’s lightsaber?”

Finn nodded. “Yup, got it right he- wait. Skywalker’s lightsaber!?”

Aliana nodded. “Yup. Luke’s and Anakin’s before him.”

“Wha-? Well you didn’t tell me THAT before you gave it to me!?” Finn said incredulously.

“It’s a lightsaber, who used to own it isn’t that important,” Aliana said flatly. “Do yourself a favor, though. Don’t think about who or what that weapon has killed.”

Finn looked at Aliana with concern. “... Why? What did i-”

“I said don’t think about it,” Aliana interrupted, “It’s a weapon. It’s useful. Nothing more. Now c’mon, I want you to practice with it. You never know what we’ll run into on the planet’s surface. If you encounter Kylo Ren you want to be able to survive.” Finn nodded and followed Aliana, curious as to what she had alluded to regarding what the lightsaber had killed, but putting it out of her mind like she’d said.

Aliana proved to be an effective teacher. In only fifteen minutes, Finn had a full grasp on the most basic style of lightsaber combat, which Aliana had called a name he hadn’t quite caught when she said it. He had to admit it felt good to be swinging the lightsaber with more control than he had on Takodana. He actually felt like he could hold his own. A lightsaber wasn’t too different from a vibroblade or a riot baton, which he was extremely well trained in, but the blade of pure plasma made it feel weightless and unbalanced. It had taken some time to get used to it’s unique feeling in his hand. Especially with how the hilt buzzed. Weapons were easy, though. Finn was one of the most talented marksmen in the First Order, and weapons training was where he excelled. Though it had taken time to get used to the unique feel of a lightsaber, once he had it was like any other melee weapon.

As the two shut off their lightsabers, Finn cast a glance toward his teacher. She was focused on the practice, but he could tell her mind was still drifting elsewhere. He wasn't certain how he knew that, he could just... feel her anxiety. "I'm worried about her too," he said, laying a hand on her shoulder.

Aliana felt a dismissive retort begin to form in her throat but she bit it back. This was Finn. She trusted him enough to be honest. "I wanted to keep her safe from this. I really did," she said solemnly. "But one mistake, and I let that sleazy scumbag take her away. What if... what if she isn't ok after all of this?"

"She will be," Finn said reassuringly. "The first thing that girl did when I met her was knock me on my ass, and I'm a trained soldier. She's tough as durasteel, and if she has the potential you say she does, then she'll be ok. And we will save her. I promise."

"Be careful making promises you can't keep," Aliana said warningly before her expression softened. "But... thanks... for being here."

"Someone's gotta watch your back," Finn smiled, squeezing her shoulder.

Aliana's eyes shimmered with unshed tears, and she leaned in and wrapped her arms around his shoulders, hugging him tightly, "Thanks, Finn."

Rey needed to get out of these restraints. She knew enough to repel the Dark Jedi, but she didn't know how many repeated assaults she could endure before her strength would give out. She struggled at the restraints, trying to see if she could use the Force to unlock them, but it was no use. She could make the release lever wiggle, but she couldn't apply enough pressure to something she couldn't see.

Looking around the room, she saw the reflection of the armed guard at the doorway. An idea struck her. If she could reach into someone's mind, maybe she could influence it? She pushed at the Trooper's mind in the same way she'd pushed at Kylo Ren. With no other alternative she just spoke out loud.

"You will remove these restraints and leave this cell with the door open."

The trooper halted and walked into the room. "Excuse me?" he asked, none too kindly.

Rey looked up at the trooper as he walked around to the front of the table. It was pretty clear that her initial attempt didn't work. She bit back on her frustration, unsure how a foot soldier's mind was harder to influence than a Dark Jedi's and tried again.

"You will remove these restraints and leave this cell with the door open," she repeated.

"I'll tighten those restraints, scavenger scum!" The trooper sneered at Rey.

This was infuriating. This trooper's mind wouldn't give and a tingling feeling in the back of Rey's mind told her that Kylo Ren was on his way. She couldn't afford to play games here. Her brow furrowed as she gave the stormtrooper a dirty look, her eyes narrowing on his throat. Her unseen power acting on her subconscious thought, the foot soldier suddenly felt an iron grip over his throat, stopping his breathing all together. He frantically clawed at his neck trying to pry whatever invisible power was strangling him, but to no avail.

“You will remove these restraints and leave this cell with the door open,” she repeated again with venom in her voice.

In a breathless plea for his life, the trooper responded. “I... I’ll remove the restraints! I’ll leave the door open!”

He reached out and fumbled with the controls for the restraints, unlocking them and freeing Rey’s hands and feet. This didn’t satisfy her, however, and she glanced at his gun, “And you’ll hand over your weapon.”

The Trooper handed his rifle over to her, and Rey took it. She released her grip on his throat and he took a large gasp of air, stumbling back and hitting the wall. Not losing a second, Rey lifted the rifle and pointed it at him. After just a few seconds of breathing, he nodded and stood up, hurrying to the door controls and opening them. For a very brief moment, he felt relief wash over him at having been allowed to live.

That was when Rey fired the rifle and blasted clean through his helmet. The Trooper collapsed onto the floor and Rey stepped over him and hurried as far down the corridor as she could. She knew she couldn’t handle another confrontation, so she ducked into an access port and climbed through the maintenance shafts of the base. There had to be a way out of here, she just knew it.

At that very moment, Kylo Ren turned to the corridor she had just fled from and made his way to the interrogation chambers. He opened the door to realize that the girl was nowhere to be found. Instead he found a dead trooper with a blaster wound straight to the back of his head, his rifle pilfered from his person.

“... No... Nooo...” Kylo muttered to himself, his body rumbling with growing rage. The girl couldn’t have escaped. How had she done it? She couldn’t have used the Force, she had no training! “NO!” he bellowed before drawing his lightsaber and slashing up the fallen trooper on the floor. His rage then turned to the chair and the walls of the room, sparks and cinders flying everywhere. Everything had been ruined. The girl was nowhere to be seen, and somehow she had managed to escape. He had to find her before his fellow Knights arrived, lest his failure be reported back to the Supreme Leader. He wouldn’t fail. He COULDN’T fail!

Outside, two Stormtroopers stopped just short of the doorway to see sparks flying through the door and Kylo Ren screaming inside. They looked down as the severed arm of the guard came flying out of the room and collided with the opposite wall of the corridor.

“See what I mean, Carl?” the first Trooper said, “Severance package.”

“Kid, we’re coming in hot, we need you up here!” Han called out from the cockpit.

Aliana’s eyes opened as Han’s voice broke her meditation and she sighed. She pulled herself to her feet and made her way to the cockpit. The closer they got to finding Rey, the more anxious she felt. She couldn’t keep her identity a secret anymore. Rey was going to find out she was a Sith the moment she found her. It wasn’t like she could go through the entire base without the Force or her lightsaber. The thought made her nervous. She knew this day was coming, but the uncertainty in Rey’s reaction sent waves of anxiety up her spine. She sat down in a passenger chair and tried to relax as she wrapped the Falcon in a cloak of the Dark Side. Beside her, Han and Chewie looked around, feeling a chill run through them as Aliana hid them in the Force. Neither of them were Force sensitive, but the technique the Sith was using gave them a foreboding feeling regardless.

“Alright, get ready!” Finn said as he entered the cockpit. “We still have to bypass First Order patrols once leave hyperspace.”

“Already on that,” Han said, his hand on the light speed switch.

“What? How?” Finn asked.

“We exit hyperspace in the planet’s atmosphere,” Han explained.

“What!? We can’t do that!” Finn protested

“Sure we can,” Han countered. “... If we’re lucky.”

Chewie let out a roar in protest.

“Oh don’t take his side on this!”

Finn looked over at Aliana, “Alie? A little help?”

“I like this plan,” she said, her eyes remaining closed, “The faster we get on the planet the better.”

“Brace yourselves!” Han shouted. “We drop out... now!”

With the flip of the switch, the Falcon dropped from hyperspace. The viewport flashed white for a moment before everyone in the cockpit was met with the sight of a tundra.

Han pulled up hard, the back of the Falcon just scraping against the icy surface of the planet. With a grunt of frustration, he managed to pull the Falcon back into the air just before they would have crashed into the side of a cliff. He sighed in relief as he lowered the Falcon again, flying down through a forest and clipping trees every step of the way.

“Pull up higher!” Finn stressed, grabbing Han by the shoulder.

“If I do, their scanners will pick us up, and unless the Sith knows how to interfere with scanning technology-”

“She’s practically tech-illiterate.”

Aliana opened one eye and glared at Finn.

“Well there you go, now sit down and shut up!”

The Falcon maintained its course, and after a moment they found a discrete clearing in the proximity of Precinct 47. They touched down, the freighter sinking slightly into the snow.

“Alright, if you have anything heavier to where, put it on now,” Han warned. “This planet is cold as all hell.”

Aliana nodded as she stood up, heading for the cargo hold where she’d stashed her gear. Pulling out her cloak, she slipped it on and fastened it beneath her belt. She always liked wearing her cloak, it made her feel more like a proper Sith. For all her subterfuge, Aliana had no actual shame about being Sith. On the contrary, she was quite proud of it and had been ever since her mother had been killed. Rey was the first time she ever hesitated about identifying herself, largely because of her

experience in doing so in the past. Her pride in where she came from didn't exactly make her many friends. It was just that now she actually cared.

She pulled her gloves on and hooked her lightsaber onto her belt when she felt Han standing at the doorway, watching her.

"What is it?" she asked, turning her head back to acknowledge him.

"You look distracted," Han said as he fastened a heavy glove onto his hand. "Anything you wanna deal with before we need you absolutely focused on the mission?"

The Sith sighed heavily. "It's just..." Aliana trailed off. "I never felt shame for who I was before. The Sith have a reputation, to be sure but my family always took pride in our heritage. So do I. But... But I care about Rey and... because of that, I came the closest I've ever been to feeling ashamed of being Sith." She hung her head low, her thick curly hair falling down to conceal her face. "What would mother think of me if she saw me like this?"

"I think she'd see a girl who's in love and who doesn't want to risk losing someone she cares about," Han said, sitting down on a crate, "Do you really think she'd be disappointed in you for that?"

Aliana looked up briefly as she fumbled with her belt, "No, I guess not. But that doesn't make me any less scared to face Rey. I've been lying to her for long enough that there's no way she isn't going to be furious with me. ...I haven't felt this scared since Corellia..."

Han let out a somber sigh. As unfortunate as it was, they were still on a time table. He placed a hand on Aliana's shoulder before talking. "I get that you're scared you'll lose her for telling the truth. Still, there's a chance that she'll get over it, but only if you and her live long enough to get off this rock before it blows. Think you can make that happen?"

Aliana clenched her jaw slightly before taking a deep breath and looking Han in the eyes. "You mean can I bust through this precinct, lightsaber blazing, cut through the First Orders defenses, turn off the shield generator to the base and grab Rey from whatever hellish torture that slimeball Kylo Ren's put her through on the way out?"

"... Yes." Han replied.

"In my sleep," she answered.

Rey took a moment to breathe as she hid inside the access point in the main corridor. It had been an hour of crawling from tunnel to tunnel, hurrying down corridors and dodging Stormtroopers. On one occasion, she'd actually hid from Kylo Ren's senses by thinking the kind of thoughts she imagined a Stormtrooper would think. It had actually worked and he didn't even notice where she was hiding. That was a trick she would have to remember. She needed to rest. This much climbing, crawling and stealth had left her exhausted and she was still nowhere near an exit or a hanger bay. The base was simply too large. As she sat, nestled among wires and cables, she quietly wondered where Finn and Aliana were. She didn't dare hope that they were coming for her, she'd made that mistake before and now staying put wouldn't do her any good. Whatever the Sith wanted her for, she had to assume she had given up.

She had to rely on herself and these abilities she was only just beginning to understand. With enough rest she could probably compel another hapless trooper to do her bidding, but to what end? If she could maybe find a hanger she could hijack a ship to get off the planet? That plan came with an entire cascade of problems, but admittedly her options were very limited. If she didn't think of something she may very well just sit where she was and wait for death. Something she was not interested in doing. Even as hopeless as her situation had become, she physically couldn't find it within herself to give up. There had to be a way out of this place. She knew it.

After another moment, she had fully caught her breath and peaked out from the access point. The corridor was empty and Rey felt brave enough to hurry through it to try and find someplace to get her bearings.

As she tore off down the hallway, she felt overcome with an enormous wave of sadness and fear. It felt just as alien to her as the hatred she'd felt the last time she looked Aliana in the eye, but it also felt... duller. It wasn't the same kind of sensation, it was a lot more distant and felt like it was closing around her rather than coming from inside her. Maybe she was sensing the feelings of someone this time? But who? She couldn't imagine Kylo Ren feeling like this, and his thoughts had felt a lot louder and clearer for whatever reason.

Still it was something she recognized. The presence, the way the sadness and fear rippled over her. There was something familiar about it, almost comforting.

Then she stopped dead in her tracks as it hit her. She'd felt this similar kind of sensation on the Fury, when she was thrown into the wall and Aliana had been checking her to see if she was alright. Was... was she feeling Aliana? Through the Force? Was she sad? Scared? About what? She shook her head. She couldn't focus on whatever this feeling was. Not when her life was on the line. Her own survival was the priority here. She wouldn't waste her time hoping for someone else to come for her. Never again. Her fate was in her own hands now.

Aliana grunted as she forced her lightsaber through an unsuspecting Stormtrooper and kicked him down into the chasm. Why the First Order didn't install guardrails completely eluded her, but they proved useful for disposing of the bodies. Han, Finn and Chewie followed along behind her, watching her back and peripherals as she led them through the massive complex. Finn instructed her on which way the shield generator controls could be found.

"Do you actually know how to shut down the shield generator?" Aliana asked as she used the Force to mind-control a Stormtrooper and make him jump into the chasm.

Finn attempted to ignore the admittedly cold blooded technique Aliana just used and attempted to give her a satisfactory answer. "I mean... we got lightsabers. That should do the trick, shouldn't it?"

Aliana glared at Finn. "If hitting something with lightsabers was enough to bring the entire base down, Kylo Ren would have done that for us, long ago. Getting to the generator won't get us very far if we don't know how to shut it off."

Aliana lifted her hand and signaled for them to stop as she heard the loud and disciplined footsteps of a commanding officer. She looked up to see a Stormtrooper in extremely shiny, durasteel gear and a side-cape walking on the catwalk overhead.

"Who's that?" she asked.

“Captain Phasma,” Finn said with a shudder. “She commands the ground troops. I’m surprised she hasn’t heard us yet.”

Aliana pursed her lips in thought. “You think she knows how to turn off the generator?”

Finn’s face lit up as he understood what Aliana was getting at. “Oh, absolutely.”

“Great! Lead us up to somewhere we can cut off her patrol,” Aliana said as she glanced back at Chewie, “Ready to body-slam a Captain?”

Chewie growled in agreement.

“I like you.”

Finn directed them to the upper level, dispatching Stormtroopers every step of the way. Phasma’s patrol took her around the main corridors and causeways in a route that extended twenty kilometers. If they missed her, it would take an hour to find her again, which was time they didn’t have. Especially if they wanted to find Rey and blow the base before the Republic was completely destroyed.

“You know, this is a lot more familiar than I thought it would be,” Han remarked as they climbed an access hatch to the upper levels.

“How so?” Aliana asked.

“On the Death Star we had a Jedi with us,” Han explained, checking below him to make sure Chewie wasn’t lagging behind, “Hopefully this ends better.”

“What happened to him?”

“Vader killed him.”

“That’s comforting,” Aliana said sarcastically as she pushed open the access port.

The entire group climbed out of the hatch as quickly as they could. With quiet but hurried steps, they rushed to catch up with Phasma. Crossing the catwalk they made it to a causeway that intersected with the main corridors. Aliana motioned for the group to hang back. She closed her eyes and reached out with her senses. Her augmented hearing caught the sound of footsteps heavier than most stormtroopers.

“Chewie,” she whispered, calling him to the front of the group. The wookiee stood by, ready to sprint down the walkway on command. Aliana narrowed her gaze at the end, not waiting until Phasma was in sight before she signaled Chewie to charge. By the time the captain was about to turn the corner, the wookiee struck true, tackling her into the wall.

Aliana drew her lightsaber and pointed it at Phasma’s throat, “Hello Captain,” she smiled.

“You must be the Sith that disgraced the General,” Phasma grunted, coughing from the sheer force of Chewie slamming her into the wall.

“Nice to know I’m appreciated. Now you’re gonna help us kill all your friends!” Aliana grinned, almost sadistically.

“Why would I do that,” Pasma countered. Aliana could almost hear the scowl from behind the helmet.

“Because otherwise you’re going to find out how the Dark Side can make you feel your limbs being burnt to a crisp AFTER I already removed them from your person,” Aliana explained.

Pasma was quiet for a moment. “The shield controls are that way.”

Aliana motioned for Finn to keep her at gunpoint, who approached with a wary look on his face as he motioned for Pasma to follow, “You’re a little scary sometimes, you know that?”

“It helps to be terrifying,” Aliana said, glancing down the chasm. What she saw made her heart leap, “Hey Finn? You think you can handle the shields on your own?”

“Maybe, why?”

Aliana pointed down two levels below and Finn followed her to see Rey crawling out of the trench wall and up onto the causeway. His eyes widened and he looked at Aliana, “Yeah, I can handle this. You make sure she’s safe.”

“Got it,” Aliana smiled, grabbing Finn’s shoulder and giving it an affectionate squeeze, “We’ll meet up later.”

Finn nodded and turned back to Pasma, his rifle trained on her back as the group ushered her over to the shield controls. Aliana meanwhile lowered herself down to drop down the catwalk below. She landed one level lower, then the other. By the time she was level with Rey, the other woman’s back was to her as she frantically pointed her rifle too and fro.

Clearing her throat, Aliana prepared herself for the moment of truth. She decided to speak softly, wanting to get Rey’s attention without giving her reason to fire blindly behind her.

“Hello, there,” she said plainly.

Rey whipped around, rifle in position, only for her eyes to widen at the sight of Aliana.

“Miss me?” Aliana asked right before a blaster bolt just barely missed the side of her face. “Whoa!”

“Stay back, Sith!” Rey warned.

Aliana felt her chest tighten at Rey’s anger. She already knew. Despite her anxiety, she didn’t turn away, as much as a part of her wanted to cut her losses and run. She couldn’t, not without getting them off the planet first. “Rey, we came back for you,” she said slowly, keeping her hands elevated from her sides and away from her lightsaber.

Rey kept her rifle trained on Aliana, a storm of conflicting feelings raging inside her mind. “... Who’s we?” she demanded.

“Finn, Han and Chewie,” Aliana replied. “They’re on the upper levels. We can meet up with them and then get off this planet together.”

“Why should I believe you!” Rey spat back. “After all the time you spent lying to me!”

Aliana was silent. It hurt her to see Rey this angry at her, despite how much she knew she deserved it. “Look, Rey... I was wrong to keep the truth from you. It was a stupid, selfish and narrow minded thing to do. I lied to you about being a Sith, and I’m sorry. But right now, your safety matters more to me than whatever you may think of me. If you’re willing to trust me just long enough to get you away from this place, I promise I will never bother you again... OK?”

The rifle shook in her grip. This could have all been a trick. She could have lowered her guard for a split second and that would have spelled the end for her. That’s what these Sith were known to do.

But... she came back for her. Her friends came back for her. Something she'd wanted to hear ever since she was little, and now it was happening. Slowly, but surely, Rey lowered her weapon. Amidst the sorrow welling up inside her that she had, in fact, ruined everything, Aliana felt a twinge of relief that Rey was agreeing to trust her for now.

“Your lightsaber,” Rey said firmly, “Give it to me.”

Aliana didn’t even hesitate and removed her lightsaber from her belt, holding it by the emitter as she slowly stepped forward and held it out to her. Rey took it and was briefly surprised at how heavy it was. She stared down at it, seeing it in a much different light than she used to. Knowing it wasn’t in fact a scare prop and that it was Aliana’s actual weapon made it seem a lot more frightening. She handled it carefully, not wanting to activate it into her own chest, and stuck it into the wraps of her tunic. She finally looked up at Aliana, and cursed herself for not being able to ignore how beautiful she was. She was so angry, and hurt, and still didn’t know what she wanted with her. But looking into Aliana’s beautiful crimson eyes still cut through all of that and made her feel ever so slightly safer.

“Alright,” Rey said more softly than she wanted to. “Where now?”

Aliana couldn’t help but feel a small smile creep on her lips as she gestured behind her. “This way. The others are turning off the shield generator to this place before the Resistance arrives to destroy it.”

“Where are we meeting them?”

“Just outside the base’s oscillator,” Aliana said, pointing behind Rey at a corridor heading out to the east, “That way.”

Rey motioned for Aliana to walk in front of her, and Aliana took the implication and led her out toward the exit. The two walked in silence, with Aliana able to feel the conflicted emotions coming off of Rey with every step. She wanted to say something, to try and explain herself. She wanted to just tell her everything. But if she let herself get distracted now, they’d be ambushed. So the two continued to walk in silence, with Rey glancing at her on occasion.

“...You were right about one thing,” Rey said, breaking the silence.

Aliana looked back at Rey, her expression puzzled.

“...Kylo Ren is a grease stain,” Rey added.

A small smile once again graced the Sith’s lips.

Come Back For Me

Chapter Notes

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The battle had gone miserably. Finn and Han had disabled the shields, but the fighters were having trouble actually damaging the oscillator. Even with the Fury's startling weapons capacity, they'd only done minor superficial damage to the structure, let alone the internal mechanisms. The First Order had armored this critical component to such a degree that they were going to need an entire bombing fleet in order to rupture it.

And that was before Poe counted the TIE fighters buzzing around them like wasps.

"Captain Dameron, come in! What's your status?" came Aliana's voice on the comm system as Poe narrowly avoided a cruise missile.

"The shield's down, but our weapons are barely making a scratch on that thing!" Poe said in exasperation. "We're outnumbered 30 to one up here and that weapon is almost done charging!"

"That does paint the situation as rather grim, Master Dameron," 2V chimed.

"AND your droid won't shut up!" Poe added with disdain. "Any chance you can do anything else where you are? Do some damage? Expose a weak point?"

"I think we can do one better, actually," Aliana said, her holo-figure turning behind her, "We're gonna blow a hole in the oscillator. If you can, take the Fury inside and blow it up from the guts out."

"That weapon could fire before I get in there."

"I can buy you a few extra seconds at best."

"That's all I need."

"Got it. Amorosa out."

Aliana turned to Han, Finn, Rey and Chewie, "We need to blast that thing open so the Fury can get inside. You still have those explosives, Chewie?"

Chewie growled in affirmation.

"Excellent," Aliana smiled before turning to the others. "Finn, Han. I'll need your help planting these explosives on every level of the oscillator. You plant it, you arm it, you move on to the next one, got it?"

“This ain’t my first time blowing up a station, kid.” Han said with a confident smirk.

She turned to Rey and hesitated before finally asking, “Rey, I need my lightsaber.”

Rey stared at her, as if sizing her up. She was right, of course. She did need it. But there was something about having it that made her feel more at ease with following her. Maybe it was the trust Aliana placed in her to surrender her weapon so readily.

“Rey?” Aliana asked again, a lot more nervously this time.

Rey pulled Aliana’s lightsaber out of her robes and handed it to her. She took it, looking at her with a grateful expression on her face, “Thank you.”

She turned back to the oscillator, “Alright, it’s time to knock out a superweapon.”

Rey stepped away, suddenly unsure what to do. Aliana didn’t give her any directions to help other than handing her her weapon. Looking over at Finn, who had just begun to scale up to the next level, she decided to follow him.

“Did you know?” Rey asked when she finally caught up to him.

“Know what?” Finn asked looking back.

“About Alie- Aliana!” Rey said, quickly correcting herself.

“...Oh, yeah,” Finn said sheepishly.

“And you didn’t tell me?” Rey demanded, trying to keep her voice down despite her outrage.

“She said it was for her to tell you,” Finn explained.

“Who else knew then?” She asked indignantly.

“Uuhhh, Han, Chewie, BB-8, Poe, Maz, General Leia-”

“Oh for the love of-”

Finn sighed as he placed a charge, “Alright Rey, you really want to know why she didn’t tell you? It’s because she actually likes you, and she didn’t want to risk you being afraid of or hating her for being Sith. And you know what? That’s a fear she’s right to have, because the General was giving her a lot of suspicious looks the entire time we were on base. And even pulled her aside to yell at her,” he armed the charge and moved to the next one, throwing one to Rey to plant, “But she doesn’t care what the General thinks of her, or what Han thinks of her. She actually does care what you think of her.”

Rey was quiet for a moment. She was unsure what to say to that. When considering why Aliana kept her identity a secret, she had only considered it was for some dark, manipulative... Sith-like purposes. Apparently her suspicions of such a thing were exactly what Aliana was worried about.

“I suppose...” she said, following Finn up to the next level. “But, you were honest with me and we’re fine.”

“Yeah we are,” Finn nodded in agreement. “And yes, Aliana probably should have told you sooner. But Sith Lord is still usually considered far worse than a rogue Stormtrooper.”

“Maybe...” Rey said as she fit another charge onto a wall, “That doesn’t make me any less angry with her, though.”

“I never said it had to,” Finn shrugged, “But just... consider that before you start accusing her of some grand galactic scheme. I’m not saying she was right to lie to you, just that she didn’t have ulterior motives for doing it. She *wanted* to tell you, Rey.”

Rey frowned. The storm of conflicting emotions didn’t sate as she had hoped they would. Perhaps when they were away from this planet and Rey had time to get a proper explanation out of Aliana, the storm would settle. Now though... now her attention was drawn to a familiar, ever encroaching presence. The presence that had sought to break her in that interrogation cell. “Oh damn!” she cursed before looking outward. Sure enough Kylo Ren was seen on a nearby catwalk, frustration and petulant fury in each step. He didn’t appear to have seen them yet and even if he had, he had proven to be ineffective against Aliana anyway. Even still, Rey sneered, knowing his presence was not what they needed right now.

Finn looked out at the catwalk and winced, ducking down, “Dammit! What’s he doing here? I thought she was cloaking us!” The two of them peered out between the guardrails and watched him move to the center of the catwalk and stop there. It was as if he was waiting for something. Then they saw what made both their hearts stop dead in their chests. Han had stepped out of cover and was walking toward the catwalk.

“Han! What are you doing?!” came Aliana’s voice on the comm, but they watched Han reach up and touch his comlink and his signal went dead.

Down on the catwalk, Han stepped to the edge and looked out at his son. A whole slurry of emotions ran through him. He knew his son was gone forever, but something deep down told him he had to at least try. If he didn’t, he may as well just stop pretending he’d ever had one. “Ben!” He yelled across the chasm.

Kylo Ren slowly turned on the catwalk and started him down. “You made a mistake coming here, Old Man,” he responded. “Tell me where the girl and the Sith is, and I’ll make sure you die quickly.”

“Why don’t you take off that mask of yours first?” Han offered as he stepped closer to Ren. He knew his son wasn’t so heartless. He knew if he just tried hard enough, he could get through to him.

“What do you expect to see?” Kylo mused.

“My son.”

Kylo scoffed, shaking his head. “Your son is gone. He was weak and foolish like his father. So I destroyed him.”

Above on the overhang, Rey saw Aliana roll her eyes and mouth the words “What the kriff?!”

“That’s what Snoke wants you to believe,” Han said, stepping onto the catwalk and slowly moving toward him. “But it’s not true. My son is alive.”

Kylo Ren said nothing and instead drew back his hood to allow him to unclasp and remove his helmet. From the distance she stood, Aliana couldn't quite make out the face that was just revealed, but something about it looked familiar.

"Is this what you want?" Kylo asked. "To try and sway me back to the light and away from my true calling?"

"That's just a bunch of crap that Snoke fed you," Han responded. He got his helmet off. He was close. He could *feel* it. "All this time he only ever wanted you for your power."

'What power?' Aliana asked internally as she got up and started quietly climbing down to the catwalk. Grease stain or not, he was still dangerous to anyone without a lightsaber.

"No. The Supreme Leader is wise," Kylo bit back, "You'll see. He will crush the Republic, and the Resistance along with it. And the Sith you've been sneaking around the base with."

Han sighed and shrugged. "Yeah. We got a Sith on our side now. I know, I never thought I'd live to see the day. But do you know what that means? It means I know that you aren't lost yet. You can still turn away from this Ben. You can come home. This isn't a death sentence for you."

Kylo Ren began to look uneasy in the wake of his father's unfaltering gaze. "I... you could be right," he began, trying to swallow the lump in his throat. "I know what I have to do, I... just don't know if I have the strength to do it."

Aliana froze in her tracks and her eyes went wide. She couldn't feel unease or conflict from Kylo Ren. But hatred. Deception. Bloodlust. With a deep breath, she jumped off the platform and fell fifty feet to land in a roll on the catwalk floor, drawing her lightsaber and sprinting for the catwalk itself.

Kylo Ren flinched as he saw Aliana begin to approach him at high speed. Han turned his head to see the Sith running towards them. "Stay back, kid!" He called out. "This is a family ma-"

His sentence died in his throat as the crimson blade of a lightsaber shot through his back and out his chest. Shock and confusion flickered briefly on the old man's face before being replaced with clarity and horror. He could only hear the hissing of the blade and the loud roar of anguish from his dear friend Chewie. His feet gave out and he fell from the catwalk, plummeting into the dark seemingly endless chasm below.

Aliana skidded to a halt, watching in horror as Han fell far out of her sight. A thousand questions ran through her head. Why did he even try? Why did he so foolishly throw his life away? Why was it over so quickly? Tears started to brim in her eyes as she turned her gaze to Kylo Ren, her face contorted in fury. Her lightsaber seemed to hiss as she held it by her side and glared the Dark Jedi down.

"That... was a bad... mistake," she said slowly.

"You were too slow this time, Sith." Kylo remarked. His gaze seemed unfocused, almost appearing glassy as if he were lost in the euphoria of his own vile deed. He took a battle stance, his stable, guard-less lightsaber pointed straight at her. It was then that two more dark figures dropped down just behind Aliana. Like Kylo, they were wearing black robes and odd looking masks. Just as Aliana turned to see them approach, a third dropped down in between her and Kylo.

“The Supreme Leader sent us to deal with this one, Ren,” one of the masked figures said to him.

“No!” Kylo Ren growled, “The Sith is mine! She will suffer for disgracing me!”

Aliana perked up at that, “Did I disgrace you? Good, because I’ll do a lot more than that.” She recognized him fully now. She’d met him and his master before. Not Snoke, but Skywalker. “I’m owed *vengeance*.”

Two of the Knights drew lightsabers, and the third motioned for Kylo Ren to leave, “The Supreme Leader is through with your failures. Now go find the girl.”

“I will have my-” Kylo’s vow for vengeance was cut short by a shot from Chewie’s bowcaster striking him in the side. The Dark Jedi buckled and fell to his knees from the impact. Soon Chewie and the others were in a firefight with the nearby Stormtroopers.

“Look at that. They gave away their position. Lucky you,” remarked the knight closest to Kylo. “Now get on your feet and deal with it.”

Aliana briefly considered staying to humiliate these Knights as she had Kylo Ren, but the thought of Ren chasing after Rey again made her unwilling to make the same mistake twice but with even more of her friends. Instead, she leapt up and back-flipped over the Knights that had cut off her exit, landing on the other side of them and cutting one down before she turned and sprinted back toward her friends. There would always be another day to kill these fools.

As she sprinted out toward her friends, she saw Rey looking absolutely distraught. She protected them from blaster fire as Chewie was mowing down Stormtroopers left and right.

“He killed him!” Rey shouted at Alie. “He killed him!”

“And he will suffer and die for that,” Aliana assured her. “But we’re at a disadvantage here. We have to set off the charges and get out before this place blows!”

Rey swallowed back a sob but after a moment to look at their situation, outnumbered and outgunned, she nodded at Aliana.

“OK, now follow me. Finn, be ready with that detonator!” she called out.

As they made their way outside, Aliana checked to make sure no fighters would be caught by the explosion and gave Finn the signal. He hit the switch and the charges blew, knocking all of them back through the sheer force of the explosion. Through the fire and smoke, Aliana could see a large opening having been cut into the oscillator just big enough for the Fury to fit through.

“Poe! It’s done!” Aliana yelled into her comm, “Get in there!”

“Amorosa, that weapon is fully charged! I’m not going to have enough time to blast it to pieces!” Poe’s voice came from the comm.

Aliana glanced back toward the massive trench hundreds of kilometres away where the actual emitter for the weapon was glowing and ready to fire at any minute, “How much time do you need?”

“Fifteen seconds!” Poe yelled, already tearing for the hole.

“I can get you that,” Aliana nodded, as she watched the weapon’s emitter start to spin. She deactivated her lightsaber and threw it to Rey, “Go and get the Falcon, I need you to come back for me.”

Rey looked down at the weapon thrown into her hand, then back up at Aliana. “Wait, what? What are you going to do!?” she asked, panic seeping heavily into her voice.

“Something probably very stupid and against my survival instincts! But hey, if it works, we’ll get to laugh about it later,” Aliana said, attempting to give Rey an easy smile. “So long as you... you know... come back for me.”

Rey frowned. The thought of just leaving Aliana here suddenly crossed her mind and just as suddenly filled her with disgust. She shook her head and pointed at the Sith. “You have a lot of explaining to do when this is over,” she said through gritted teeth.

Aliana nodded. “I know, and I will.”

Rey stared her down before turning and breaking off into a sprint, with Finn lagging behind only a moment before following her. Aliana trembled as she wondered if this would be the last time she saw either of them. She wished she could afford the chance to watch until they vanished from sight, but... the clock was ticking. And the Fury was getting closer.

She stepped up onto a high rock protruding from the planet’s surface and got a clear view of the emitter. It was just about ready to fire. She needed to have precise timing or it would be too far away. At hyper lightspeed, she would only have a fraction of a second. She closed her eyes and focused. Normally she would channel her anger or hatred for something like this. She certainly had no shortage of it. The First Order, the grease stain, the Jedi that attacked her and took her mother from her. But that wouldn’t be sufficient. She needed something more raw. More powerful. She thought about Rey. Picturing every detail in her mind and focusing on them. She truly wished things could have gone differently. That she could go back and tell her the truth from the start. It was a foolish and stupid decision, and it probably would cost her dearly, assuming she survived. She’d been so afraid to lose her. So afraid to make her afraid of her. And now she couldn’t think about anything but whether or not she was safe. And even whether or not she was okay.

She loved her.

Aliana took a deep breath and whispered, “*Through Passion, I gain Strength... through Strength I gain Power.*”

With a roaring screech that echoed across the many chasms of Starkiller Base, the weapon fired.

Aliana’s eyes snapped open and she threw out her hand in a grasping motion and the massive, thousand-mile wide beam slowed to a halt in the planet’s atmosphere. It roared and churned and strained against the force that was preventing it from moving any higher. It burned so brightly that Aliana felt her skin begin to burn just through sheer proximity. But more importantly, she felt it resist. The pull of the beam was intense and it took all her strength just to stop it, let alone keep it still. She lifted her other hand and pulled back harder, feeling the pull become even stronger as the energy from the weapon backed up and strained even harder against her grip.

Aliana’s eyes burned a bright yellow as she struggled even harder, letting out a low, guttural growl as she exerted every scrap of the Dark Side she could muster to keep that beam staying exactly where she wanted it.

“Is that seriously what I think it is?!” came a voice over the comm.

“Don’t question it, just move!” Poe’s voice yelled as he tore inside the oscillator.

The Fury flew through the burning hole faster than anything the defences could even hope to counter against. Turbo lasers fired wildly inside, ripping through mechanisms setting a flurry of explosions coursing through the veins of the base. The damage they were causing coupled with the stalling of the weapon’s blast that no one could explain incited a chain reaction that was causing the entire planet to come apart at the seams.

Finn and Rey were in sight of the Falcon when the burning beam in the sky drew their attention away. They simply stood in awe of what they saw. Even if Rey couldn’t see her, she knew. This was Aliana. She just saved countless lives in an instant.

It was then that she was suddenly shoved back by an invisible power, knocking her head against a tree and losing consciousness.

“Rey!” Finn shouted, running over to her. He dropped to his knees beside her and cradled her head in his hands, running his fingers over the back of her head and trying to see if she was bleeding. That was when he heard it. The snap-hiss of a lightsaber being ignited behind him. He slowly turned his head to see the Dark Jedi who never seemed to learn when to quit. He slowly stood up, gripping Anakin’s lightsaber in his hands as he stared down his former Commander.

“Traitor!” Kylo Ren seethed, flourishing his lightsaber. It seemed to be built properly this time, with no vents or a blade that crackled like it was made of lightning. “That lightsaber... belongs to me!”

“Come get it!” Finn shot back, steeling himself. His mind thought back to everything Aliana had taught him up to this point.

As Kylo lunged at him, bringing his blade down, Finn managed to parry it on the downswing. Again with the up swing. Kylo’s assault was met with an appropriate counter, but Finn was on his back foot the entire time. The tells in Kylo’s attacks were readable, especially with his limp, but the functional red lightsaber meant he was faster than Finn was expecting. Keeping his motions light and fast were all he could do to keep up.

He remembered that Aliana had told him that in lightsaber combat he didn’t need much strength and that a skilled duelist would immediately move to the next attack the moment they were parried, so he held the lightsaber in one hand and spun it to meet each attack from Kylo Ren. Sure enough, he’d only had to so much as tap his blade before Ren was convinced his attack was in vain and switched. This revelation allowed Finn to focus more on being quick and on the ball instead of trying to meet strength that simply wasn’t going to be there.

Kylo Ren, however, was infuriated. How was a Stormtrooper holding his own against him?! What made him capable of wielding a lightsaber so fluently?! His ego couldn’t take it. He’d been humiliated in every confrontation with this gaggle of traitors so far, he was not going to be humiliated again. He slammed down hard toward Finn’s head and tried to break past his guard, something Finn clearly hadn’t been expecting as he was immediately knocked off his feet and to the ground.

In that moment of vulnerability, he brought his blade down onto Finn's back, slashing the unarmoured fabric of his jacket and deep into the other man's flesh. Finn let out a strangled cry in pain before the intensity caused him to pass out.

Kylo Ren panted hard. The elimination of the traitor caused him to exert himself more than he thought, even with his injury. He shook his head of the thought, wanting to do away with the sources of his humiliation as quickly as possible. Reaching down, he grabbed his grandfather's lightsaber out of Finn's limp hand. He ignited it while sheathing his red blade. Both he and the unconscious man were suddenly bathed in a blue light. His gaze turned back down to Finn, the blue lightsaber reeling back to deliver the killing blow.

What Kylo didn't notice was the other figure in the snow returning to consciousness, he didn't see Rey look in horror as Kylo stood above her friend, who suffered a gaping, burning wound and laid motionless on the ground. He didn't feel her panic and her fury until she was already lunging towards him, stopping his blue blade from killing her friend with a red one.

Kylo's head snapped to Rey, glaring her down, "You can't escape me alive, and you can't hope to kill me," he hissed.

"Maybe not, but I can certainly try," Rey snarled as she shunted Kylo's blade away from Finn and lunging at him.

Almost instantly, Kylo Ren was on the defensive. The Sith had fought with precision and the traitor fought with enough skill to survive a few minutes, but the girl... the girl fought with fury. More fury than he'd seen in another Force user before. Even more than the Sith. He could feel the anger running off of her. Anger toward him for kidnapping her, for violating her mind, for killing Han Solo, for hurting her friend. Anger toward the Sith for her dishonesty. Rey had been holding back so much up to this point and now it was all pouring out of her like a wave.

Kylo was unprepared for the utter ferocity the girl was displaying. This scavenger whom, only hours ago, quaked helplessly in fear at his presence. This utter nobody, whom he had intended to use as a weapon against the Sith. This scum, this puppet was actually pushing him back. He couldn't take this. Not another humiliation. No more. Unclasping the other lightsaber from his belt, he ignited it and suddenly went back on the offensive. A flurry of red and blue blades put Rey on the defensive. Her attention constantly alternated between the two weapons. The blade training Aliana had given her did not cover dual wielding, therefore all she had to go on was intuitive thinking.

The ferocity of this attack did nothing to quell the rage inside of her however, nor the power that it offered her. It seemed as though the longer they fought the less overwhelming the fight became. She could see attacks before they landed more clearly. She could see areas to counter present themselves with each strike. The advantage Kylo had with his surprise switch to dual wielding was gradually diminishing.

And then the ground beneath them shook violently, sending Rey down to one knee and both of Kylo's lightsabers down onto her. She brought Aliana's lightsaber up to lock with his, a contest of raw strength raging between them beneath crumbling ground.

Kylo pushed harder, very briefly causing Rey's arms to buckle, but she regained her center and held him back, "You need a teacher! I can show you the ways of the Force!"

Rey only glared up at him, her exhaustion only further intensifying the hatred she felt toward him, and how desperately she wanted him to be as far away from her as possible. Thinking back to what she'd done in the interrogation room, she took one hand off Aliana's lightsaber and threw it outward, creating a shockwave that forced Kylo off balance and slipping in the snow. Jumping to her feet, Rey slashed at his leg, sending him to his knees, and then down onto Anakin's lightsaber, severing the emitter and rendering the weapon completely useless. With one final swing, the tip of Aliana's lightsaber sliced a deep cut across his face and sent him back into the snow, writhing in pain from the burning cut.

Taking a moment to catch her breath, Rey looked down onto the beaten and broken man before him. He looked up at her, any vestige of his dignity was now in complete tatters. This person before her, this creature, was the definition of pitiful. But Rey had no pity in her heart for this facade of a man, and she never would. As she looked down at this slimy loathsome piece of trash, the voice in her head told her to finish the job. To put him out of everyone else's misery once and for all. It was not a voice she was especially accustomed to, nor one with whom she disagreed.

Alas, spending just a moment too long to dwell on the thought, the ground beneath them tore open. Rey's thoughts shifted from the contemptible grease stain that was Kylo Ren and back to her current situation. The planet was coming undone. She and the others needed to leave.

The others. Aliana. Finn.

Rey's legs moved faster than she knew they ever could as she darted back to Finn's unconscious body. Sliding down to his level, she placed a finger on his pulse. It was faint but still there. He was alive but he needed medical attention as soon as possible. Slinging him over her shoulder, she darted the two of them to the nearby Falcon, where Chewie was already prepping the freighter for takeoff. Setting Finn down onto the closest thing to a medbay she could find, she braced herself as the ship lifted into the air and prepared to leave the atmosphere.

Rey froze for just a second, and the thought of leaving Aliana behind flashed into her mind. Again, she felt disgusted with herself for even considering it, but now... now she just couldn't bear the thought. As much as Aliana had betrayed her trust, the thought of leaving her behind filled her with even more raw, visceral sadness than even watching Han plunge into the core of the planet.

"Chewie! No! Don't leave, Aliana is waiting for us!" she called out, rushing to the cockpit.

Chewie grunted in acknowledgement and kept the falcon low. The two of them looked out the viewport looking for any sign of Aliana. A feat that was difficult as the burning beam of the base's weapon had been replaced by the bright, burning flashes of Ilum's Sun trying to break out of it's prison. Eventually, Rey could make out a small silhouette along a rock formation. "There!" she exclaimed.

Aliana, for her part, was weak. Even holding that beam for the few seconds she had before the oscillator went up in flames had sapped her of so much energy that she could barely stand. She seemed to just stare at the collapsing planet around her, occasionally stumbling on her own feet. She only looked up when the lights of the Falcon caught her attention and Rey got a very brief look of the hopeless expression on her face, before a weak smile quickly replaced it.

The Falcon's ramp opened and Rey came out to help guide her inside. Aliana took her hand and limply stumbled onto the ramp, almost risking falling off before Rey braced her shoulders and helped her up into the ship. She sat Aliana down, and watched as the Sith seemed to gasp for air.

There was a yellow tint to her eyes that was gradually fading away and it looked like her veins had darkened around her temples.

“I don’t know how you did that,” Rey breathed.

“Neither do I,” Aliana said, her voice barely a whisper.

With everyone accounted for, Chewie set the thrusters to maximum and sped as fast as they could away from the imploding planet. Through his peripheral he could see Resistance and First Order ships alike flying away from the surface. Behind the fleeing ships, the chaos appeared less like simple blooming of explosions and more like giant ripples of plasma one would see along the surface of a star.

Several hours in Hyperspace was not an ideal situation for anybody, least of all Rey and Aliana. Aliana had recovered from exerting herself, for the most part, and was up front with Rey helping to co-pilot while Chewie slept. With Chewie asleep and Finn still unconscious, it was just the two of them. Alone.

And uncomfortable.

Aliana had promised to tell Rey everything, except perhaps one detail she considered to be irrelevant, but now that they were alone together that was proving to be increasingly difficult. Rey hadn’t spoken to her since rescuing her from the planet and Aliana was almost afraid to test her. The silence in the cockpit was deafening. The two of them simply sat there, pretending to ignore the thickening tension, simply wanting the other to make the first move as if this conversation were a duel.

It was Rey who broke the silence first, as the anger and frustration she felt from the events of that day hadn’t ever completely died down. In fact, Aliana’s silence made it easier to remember why exactly she was mad. “Well?” she prompted.

“...Yes?” Aliana replied meekly.

“You promised you would explain yourself,” Rey said through clenched teeth, her knuckles white with how tightly she was gripping the controls.

Aliana sighed, relenting that this was no time to be skittish. After everything Rey endured since the two had met, she deserved the truth. “... My name is Aliana Beniko. That’s still true,” she began. “But one day, my mother gave me another name. Darth Amorosa.”

Rey kept her gaze steady on Aliana as she explained herself.

“I’m a Sith Lord. As was my mother. As was everyone in my family for countless centuries,” Aliana continued. “My family kept to itself, for the most part. When the schism in the Sith that created Vader’s line of Sith happened, my ancestors survived. Over the years... the Galaxy moved past the wars with the Sith Empire, and moved to a new era of peace. My family stayed in the Outer Rim and Wild Space just getting by. We bothered nobody.”

Aliana’s hands gripped the hem of her robes as an unpleasant memory returned to the forefront of her mind. “My mother was killed by a Jedi Master. That is also still true. But they killed her because we were Sith. They saw my mother teaching me the Sith Code, and attacked. They killed

her and I fled. Without her, all I could do was survive. Offer my skills to whoever paid, did what I could to maintain the Fury and try to keep moving. I never stayed in one place for very long. I couldn't afford it. It seemed like someone in every corner of the galaxy wanted the Sith dead. For the longest time, that didn't bother me. I knew people would inevitably discover what I was so I never hid it. I wore my heritage as a badge of honor. That is, until..." Aliana trailed off, unsure what to say next.

"Until me," Rey finished.

Aliana nodded.

"What makes me different?" Rey asked, her scowl not wavering in the slightest, "Why were you afraid to tell me, but not the others? What were you planning?"

Aliana hesitated, unsure of how to answer, "I... I wasn't planning anything, Rey."

"I don't believe you," Rey said, turning her head to stare out at the Hyperspace tunnel, "What did you want from me?"

"Nothing."

"Anyone who meets me wants something from me," Rey seethed, gripping the control rod for the Hyperdrive tightly, "Finn wanted someone to watch his back while he fled the First Order, Unkar Plutt wanted me to retrieve scrap for him, Kylo Ren wanted me for..." she shuddered at the thought of just what exactly Ren seemed to want her for. "The only people who didn't want anything from me left me to rot on a desert planet in the middle of nowhere! If you really didn't want anything from me you wouldn't have come looking for me, so what is it?!"

"Rey... I..." Aliana bit back the words that threatened to come out of her mouth. Somehow she felt bringing those words to life would make things worse.

It was then that Rey chose to flip the switch and bring the ship out of hyperspace. Aliana looked between Rey and the viewport bewildered. Not only did they drop back to normal space, but the thrusters weren't on. They were practically motionless. "Rey, what are you doing!?"

"We're not going anywhere until you tell me the truth!" Rey sneered, her intense gaze locking with Aliana's, "I'm not going to the Resistance base with a Sith who is keeping things from me!"

"Rey, this is ridiculous! We fled from First Order space! They'll be right on top of us in minutes!" Aliana protested.

"Then talk! What do you want from me!"

"Nothing! I-" Aliana swallowed a lump in her throat. "I just want you to be ok. That's all."

"That's all?" Rey asked disbelievingly. "Why should I believe that!? What is it? Why are you so concerned about me?!"

Aliana sighed. Rey was really going to make her say it. She would make her say it, then refuse to believe her, and then they would get annihilated by a dreadnought that caught up to them while they were busy arguing. Aliana resigned to her fate, knowing that things couldn't get any worse. It was clear that Rey would rather die on her own terms than leave anything else up to chance.

“Because... I love you.”

Rey’s scowl fell only to be replaced by a look of confusion and surprise, “...What?”

“I said... I love you,” Aliana repeated, taking a deep and steadying breath, “You mean... so much to me, and I couldn’t bear the thought of you in that creature’s clutches. I couldn’t think, I couldn’t focus on anything the longer you were on Starkiller Base. I kept thinking about what kind of torture he might have been putting you through, and how I let that happen because I wasn’t looking out for you. I...”

She shut her eyes for a moment, trying to keep tears from streaming down her face.

“I just wanted you to be okay,” she finished, “Even if you hated me for lying to you, as long as I knew you were safe I could live with that.”

The confusion on Rey’s face didn’t falter as Aliana continued her explanation. If anything it only became greater. This didn’t make sense. No one had ever thought about her this... selflessly. No one she knew was ever this selfless about anything. She couldn’t understand it. It frustrated her, as did the calm almost serene tone in Aliana’s voice as she talked about such selfless love.

In this frustration, she turned her gaze back to the viewport and spoke without thinking. “Then live with it.”

Aliana looked genuinely hurt, and moved to reach for her. While she said she could live with it if Rey chose to hate her, that didn't make it any less heartbreaking.

Rey didn’t see the tears brimming in Aliana’s eyes but somehow she felt them. Only when the other woman began to stand up and leave did Rey suddenly realize what she had just said. She whipped back around and grabbed Aliana’s wrist before she could move any further. “WAIT!” she said almost desperately, looking up to see two beautiful ruby eyes glistening with tears.

“What?” Aliana asked, her voice cracking with the same fragility as if she had spoken through a sob, “I don’t have anything left to tell you, Rey.”

“I...” Rey sighed, trying to get a hold at the sudden sense of panic that shot through her. “I’m sorry... that was cruel,” she said. “I... believe you.”

Aliana trembled and the tears started to finally fall down her cheeks. She let out a cracked sob as she sat down on a crate beside her, “I didn't want anything from you, Rey. I wasn't planning anything. I was just scared. Scared I'd lose the only friend I'd had in over a decade. Someone who I love so much. I know I should have told you, I shouldn't have waited so long. But I...” she trailed off, staring down at the floor as her fear, combined with her exhaustion, had overwhelmed her, “...I’m sorry...”

“...I know,” Rey said, her grip on Aliana’s wrist shifting to gently squeeze her hand. “I understand why. But...” she trailed off, taking a moment to consider her words so as to prevent hurting Aliana any further. “...You still lied to me. Trust is something I’ve given to very few people in my life. Ever since you and I met, you’ve become closer to me like no one else. I considered you my best friend. And then I learned you kept your entire life a secret from me and I... I trusted you and you lied to me. I can’t just get over that, you know?”

As calm and patient as Rey tried to make her words, she felt that there was something more she could say. Squeezing Aliana's hand gently she continued. "Look... so long as you can promise me no more secrets and that you'll be absolutely honest with me from here on out... there's a chance that I'll be able to trust you again. But it won't be for a long while, understood? You need to prove this to me."

Aliana looked up, her eyes raw with tears and her face carrying a look of surprise. She took a moment to fully process Rey's words and the realization that she wasn't going to be sent away, and nodded, squeezing Rey's hand, "I can do that. I promise, I won't keep anything from you ever again."

Rey wanted to believe Aliana more than anything, but she also knew that being so quick to trust Aliana was what got them in this situation to begin with. She had to remain firm in her conviction. A part of her wished to try and test this promise. To ask her something deep and personal and see if the Sith would be honest, however the last few hours had been physically and emotionally draining for the both of them. Such a test at this point would seem unfair.

Perhaps a simpler question at least.

"Kylo Ren seemed to get it in his head that you meant to take me on as your apprentice," Rey said almost matter of factly. "Did you?"

Aliana hesitated, her tired mind unable to process the question as quickly as she could fully rested, "Uh... no. It never really occurred to me. Maybe try to teach you the basics to protect yourself from him, but I never intended to train you completely. I mean, I can if you want me to, but... I had no plans."

Rey considered Aliana's words. She felt as though she was telling the truth, a feeling she was rather confident in since discovering she could touch minds. "... That's alright thanks," Rey said, declining her offer. "Alright. We still have a long way to go, but... it's a start."

Aliana nodded and returned to her seat as Rey started the Hyperdrive and accelerated the ship. She looked down at the controls, only a small portion of them she knew how to operate, and started diverting power to the Hyperdrive for her. As the ship picked up speed and the blackness of space was replaced by a comforting Hyperspace tunnel, Aliana felt as if a huge weight had been lifted off her shoulders. Things weren't great, but Rey had given her the chance to earn back her trust.

And she wasn't going to waste it.

Misdirections and Cover-Stories

Chapter Notes

14/4/2022 - Updated to better convey Aliana's internal monologue and correct some dialogue choices.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The energy in the Resistance base was one of elation and wonder. Simultaneously celebrating the destruction of Starkiller Base, and wondering how they'd pulled off such a clutch victory. The base's weapon had actually fired, but the plasma weapon had gotten stuck somewhere in the atmosphere of the planet. Nobody could see how it had gotten stuck, or how they'd been bought the few extra seconds they needed to blow the oscillator. It was like a miracle. Rey stepped down off the Falcon, with Aliana limping behind her, still exhausted from having pulled off said miracle. Behind both of them, Chewie was carrying the unconscious body of Finn. A medical team rushed out to meet them, taking Finn onto a stretcher while two medics looked over both Rey and Aliana.

"Lord Amorosa, there are mild plasma burns all over your face," one of the medics said, "Are you alright?"

"Uh-huh," Aliana nodded, barely paying attention as she waved the medic off. In truth, she was simply too tired to focus on the medics. Every step she took felt like an ordeal. She'd had a nap on the Falcon, but nothing short of a full night's sleep and several hours of meditation would truly revitalize her.

She glanced over at Rey, who for the most part kept her distance since their talk aboard the Falcon. Not surprising. Rey said as much in that very discussion. Still, the reminder that she had broken Rey's trust the way she had only made Aliana feel worse. On top of her injuries and fatigue, was the ever present sinking feeling of guilt. Something that would take the longest to heal. The reality that Rey had all but put a gun to her head to get her to confess her feelings wasn't lost on her. She'd nearly left them to the mercy of the enraged and vengeance hungry First Order to win a battle of wills. She was shaken by that, especially with how helpless she had been in the Falcon. She didn't know ships, she didn't know machines and engines. And Rey *knew* that.

She couldn't help but wonder, especially as she touched the singed ends of her hair from the blaster bolt that missed her by centimetres. Would Rey have killed her?

She had never kept her Sith heritage a secret before. She had always identified herself as Darth Amorosa to everyone, and she was always met with hostility, suspicion or worse. It took a lot to earn someone's trust, and it usually only came from people in such poor circumstances that a Sith skulking around wasn't a real problem to them. But she kept it secret from Rey, and had been met with friendliness, enthusiasm, and even affection. Then once Rey found out, it was back to hostility and now she had to earn back her trust. And there was no assurance that she would ever get it.

Her moment of melancholy was interrupted when a certain pilot stepped into their wing of the medbay. "Hey there," Poe nodded with a smile. "You look terrible."

“My ship better look better than I do,” Aliana retorted, managing a playful smirk.

“Just a few scorch marks from other ships on the hull. No scratches,” Poe assured her.

“Great,” Aliana smiled, before she remembered a remark Poe had made on the holocom during the assault, “Oh yeah, by the way. I’m not mean to your droid, don’t be mean to mine.”

Poe chuckled softly. “Hey now! I didn’t mean anything mean spirited towards 2V. I’m just saying I never had a problem with BB-8 pointing out the obvious at inopportune times.”

“Did BB-8 nurse you back to health after falling out of the sky in a raging ball of fire?” Aliana asked.

“...OK fair point,” Poe conceded.

“Thanks. Just because protocol droids don’t beep doesn’t mean they don’t have the same feelings as astromech droids,” Aliana laid a hand on Poe’s shoulder, and then winced. Every muscle in her body was so unbearably sore that even moving felt like an ordeal, “AH!”

“What happened to you down there?” Poe asked, looking at her with concern.

“Over-extended myself keeping that plasma weapon from leaving the atmosphere,” Aliana hissed, rubbing her shoulder.

“That was you?! HOW DID YOU DO THAT!?” Poe asked incredulously, so loudly that it grabbed the attention of everyone in the room. “Literally no one here has seen anything like that!”

Aliana glanced at Rey, who had her back turned to her, and smiled, “The Dark Side of the Force can do incredible things if you’re not afraid of it. And if you’re not afraid of yourself.”

“Duly noted,” Poe said, a grin plastered on his face. “With you on our side, maybe we won’t need Skywalker after all.”

“Let’s not get carried away here,” Aliana said, narrowing her eyes at Poe. “I can’t exactly do that on command, especially not if I’m going to be doing all the heavy lifting you’re suggesting.”

“I know, I know, just kidding,” Poe assured her. “I’m not gonna look a gift Sith in the mouth like that.”

Aliana smiled. Poe's respect, admiration and friendliness cut through her fear and doubt like a knife. Poe knew she was Sith from the word go, and had welcomed her into the Resistance with open arms. Had made a case for her aid, and never once doubted that she was genuine. She was a lightsaber on their side, and he appreciated that. She squeezed his shoulder and smiled, “Look after Finn, would you? He took a lightsaber to the back. He’s stable, but I’d feel better if someone kept an eye on him.”

Poe nodded. “Don’t worry. He’s in good hands. I’ll make sure he’s alright,” he said before glancing down at the spherical droid rolling over to his feet. “That goes double for you, right buddy?”

BB-8 beeped enthusiastically. Aliana smiled at both of them and nodded in gratitude, “I meant to ask, how’s everyone working out with the map?”

“Well, we still haven’t found where the other piece goes, but we’re working on that.” Poe stated. “Even after the success of our attack, it seems that Leia is more dead set on finding Skywalker than ever.”

Aliana winced as she glanced back toward the base’s main control room. She was going to have to tell Leia about what happened to Han, assuming Rey or Chewie hadn’t already done it. She felt a twinge of guilt in her chest at how she’d failed to intervene in time. She’d actually started to like Han, especially after he’d reassured her about both Rey and her mother. The thought of having to talk to the General, who she already figured didn’t trust her as it is, and tell her she’d failed to keep everyone safe was a daunting prospect.

Poe looked at Aliana, noticing the rather grim expression she was wearing all of a sudden and placed a hand on her shoulder. “Hey, you alright?”

Aliana snapped back to attention and nodded. “Oh yeah I’m fine!” she said. “Just uh... really tired.”

Poe smiled at that. “I’d believe that. You better get some rest,” he advised. “Don’t worry. We can be without our Dark Savior for a few hours.”

“Poe... stop doing that, please? Don’t call me a saviour. I have enough pressure on me as it is,” Aliana winced, “Don’t deify the Force or the people who use it. It never ends well.”

Poe shrugged. “Well, OK. I can stop that, but I can’t promise the rest of the base will do the same,” he said plainly. “Whether you admit it or not, you saved an entire system from being destroyed... literally with your bare hands. I’ve seen others get deified for less. You’re gonna have to change a lot of people’s perspective on things if you want that to stop completely.”

“Poe, you blew the base. Not me,” Aliana said, “All I did was buy you a few more seconds.”

She let go of him and turned away. She liked Poe, but the idea that the Resistance would see her as some kind of saviour didn’t sit well with her and Poe certainly wasn’t helping matters. She headed into the base after Rey to where Leia was staring at the sole recovered piece of the map from BB-8. As she glanced up at the map, she cocked an eyebrow as some of the stars looked vaguely familiar.

“How’s the hunt going?” she asked, looking up at Rey as she approached the holoterminal. Neither woman seemed very keen on responding to Aliana right away.

“Still trying to piece together which system this map falls under,” Leia said finally. “Considering it’s likely somewhere in the outer rim, it thankfully only gives us a couple... thousand to choose from.”

“Don’t you have an astrogation chart to compare the composition of the stars with?” Aliana asked, still trying to make out what about the star chart was familiar.

“Unfortunately, much of the Outer Rim isn’t charted by the Republic Fleet,” C-3PO piped up as he operated the holoterminal, “Much of the Republic only carries records within Republic Space.”

“The Outer Rim is probably the best place in the galaxy to hide because the Republic doesn’t keep records of that area of space,” Rey explained, “We’re flying blind. Without the rest of the map, it’s almost completely hopeless.”

“What did Luke say he was looking for?” Aliana asked.

Leia’s brow furrowed in confusion. “Looking for?”

“What was his goal on this planet?” Aliana elaborated. “What was he hoping to find here?”

Leia shook her head solemnly. “We don’t know. Luke left no message or clues for us before he disappeared. Finding this map was the closest thing to a direct message we received from him in years. If he did go to... wherever he is for a reason, he never told any of us.”

Aliana stared at the planet where the map ended. There had to be some way to narrow the list of prospective candidates down. Where would a Jedi go to... Something hit her. “C-3PO, can you download the astrogation charts from the Fury and the Falcon into the base’s mainframe?” she asked.

“Most certainly, Lord Amorosa,” 3PO replied enthusiastically. “...Though if I could inquire what for?”

“I just need the information in front of me to work with,” Aliana explained, “It’ll make sense, I promise.”

“Oh, in that case, I shall do so at once!” 3PO said with a nod before waddling over to a terminal over at the wall.

Rey walked over from where she leaned against the holoterminal over to Aliana. “What are you thinking?” Rey inquired, standing a little further from Aliana than she ordinarily would.

“I have a hunch based on historical precedent,” Aliana said as the terminal noted that the download was complete, “Now bring up the Fury’s entire list of planets that are strong in the Force and filter only those located in the Outer Rim.” 3PO hit a few more buttons, and a total of thirty planets were displayed on the holoterminal, much to the astonishment of the crowd around the holoterminal. “When Jedi and Sith want to hide, they go to planets that are strong in the Force,” Aliana explained as she walked around the terminal, “It masks their presence from being detected by other Force Users. But they can hide most effectively on a planet that is attuned inversely from themselves. Yoda was hidden on Dagobah during the Empire’s reign because it was strong in the Dark Side. That made it almost impossible for Vader to find him.” There was a collective murmur around the Resistance as this information sunk in. Aliana smiled and looked at 3PO again, “Now filter out all planets that are attuned to the Light Side of the Force.”

3PO obliged with Aliana’s request. As he pressed a button, several planets from had flicked out of sight from the holoterminal. “The remaining planets include, Malachor, Korriban, and Dromund Kaas, Lord Amorosa,” 3PO relayed. “There are several more, but my data banks are unfamiliar with these planets.”

Aliana looked at the unmarked planets. She recognized Odessen, and knew for a fact that Skywalker couldn’t be there. Malachor was a husk of a planet with barely any atmosphere. Unless Skywalker was planning on committing the world’s most painful suicide he likely wasn’t there either. Korriban would have been swarmed by the First Order instantly, and she had been to Dromund Kaas only a few months ago and had not sensed anyone on the planet or in the ruins of Kaas City. She marked each one she could safely rule out and was left with eight planets.

“That’s the best I can do,” Aliana shook her head, “If Skywalker is anywhere, he’s on one of these planets.”

Leia eyed the star map carefully before turning her gaze over to Aliana. “...That does narrow it down more than a little bit” Leia responded. “We’ll have our people cross reference this data with the map. With any luck, we’ll have our destination by the end of the week.”

The crowd around the holoterminal erupted in merry cheers. Aliana received several hurrahs and a few pats on the back from the especially bold. A wave of Leia’s hands brought the cheering down to a reasonable level. “In the meantime, we can’t afford to get lazy. The First Order just made an attempt to destroy the Republic. We can only assume their response to our counter strike will be just as ruthless. I want recon teams scouting First Order space and report any activity they see. 3PO, reach out to our contacts on Coruscant. See if recent events have given us any support. Everyone else? To your posts. May the Force be with you.”

Rey turned away from the holoterminal and out of the base. Aliana followed after her, not really knowing what else to do as Leia hadn’t actually given either of them a post. She followed Rey out into the fighter bay and watched as she stood staring at the Falcon. She’d been distant since they landed, and not just in the way she’d been after reuniting either. Everything on Starkiller Base was still eating up at her. She could feel it.

With a wince and a reminder of just how sore and tired she was, Aliana cleared her throat to alert Rey to her presence as she approached.

“You alright?” she asked quietly, standing several feet away from her.

“...I’m fine.” Rey said plainly, not turning to look at Aliana and instead keeping her gaze on the Falcon.

Aliana’s eyes alternated between the two before sighing heavily. “I’m gonna miss that old pirate,” she said wistfully.

“You could have saved him,” Rey said.

“...Rey, I tried to,” Aliana replied, not sure where the other woman was going with this.

“You could stop a hyper lightspeed planet killing superweapon with your bare hands but you can’t save one ma-”

“I’m not a god, Rey!” Aliana snapped. The suddenness and volume of her words made Rey jump back in shock. Aliana’s eyes almost appeared to be burning as her face contorted in frustration. “I don’t know how I did that and I don’t know if I could ever do it again! That was a fluke. I gambled with billions of lives and it almost killed me! I never claimed to be all powerful and I hate that that people think I can solve their problems with the wave of a hand! You want me to be honest with you Rey? This is me, being honest! I’m just one woman! I can’t fight a war by myself!”

Rey was at a loss for words. Unsure what to say as Aliana continued to glare at her, her breathing heavy from just how forceful she was shouting. The Sith rubbed her eyes with her forefinger and thumb before letting out an exasperated sigh.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have yelled,” she said. “It’s not you I’m mad at, it’s... the situation.”

Rey quietly watched her as she seemed to come down from her explosive outburst. Aliana's eyes were bloodshot and even in her anger they seemed to have this almost glazed over look to them. Just how exhausted was she? Rey suddenly felt guilty for trying to place the blame on her for Han's death. Especially after she'd run herself ragged getting everyone in and out of the superweapon in the first place. As much as she was still angry, she had to remember just how much she and the others put themselves through. And Aliana was the only one still walking around to feel the effects.

She stepped closer to the Sith and wrapped her arms around her shoulders, hugging her tightly. Aliana twitched in surprise, but eagerly accepted the hug.

"I'm sorry," Rey said quietly, "I shouldn't be blaming you."

Any and all anger Aliana had felt melted away when she felt Rey's embrace. She simply leaned into the other woman, mumbling "Thanks" into her robes as she did.

Rey pulled away slightly to get a better look at Aliana. The medical attention she received earlier did help the burns she saw all over her before, but the Sith still looked like she was on the verge of collapsing. "You need some rest," she said plainly. "Come on. Let's get you on the Fury."

Aliana couldn't find it within herself to protest with Rey. She was able to dismiss the idea of resting earlier when it was Poe saying it. With the woman she loved, who was also still struggling to trust her, such protests did not come as easily. Despite all the tension that had risen between them, the fear that was brewing inside her, Aliana *wanted* things to smooth over with her. Perhaps then they could talk about what happened on the Falcon. She allowed Rey to pull her arm over her shoulder and guide her back to the Fury. As they approached, Aliana saw 2V begin walking down the ramp to meet them.

"Oh Lady Amorosa!" 2V exclaimed in horror. "You look positively ghastly!"

"Make sure she gets a full night sleep, 2V!" Rey said, handing Aliana over to the droid. "And no less!"

"I will make it my top priority, Miss Rey!" 2V said as he guided Aliana up the Fury's ramp.

Aliana glanced back at Rey, "I..." she paused and seemed to rethink what she was about to say, "...Thank you," she said, turning her head back toward the ship. Rey caught a glimpse of her completely collapsing under 2V's support before the ramp finally closed and sealed the ship off completely.

Rey stood there outside the Fury, staring at where Aliana had disappeared. She barely heard the whirring of BB-8 as he rolled up beside her and looked up at her, beeping at her questioningly. She took her gaze, and thoughts, away from the Fury for a moment to look at BB-8. "Oh, I'm alright. BB," she assured him. "I... I just have a lot to think about."

BB-8 tilted his head slightly, a series of synthetic sounds asking her if he could help.

"It's alright, thanks," she replied. "It's something I'll have to figure out on my own."

BB-8 chirped and whined, wiggling back and forth on his ball.

"Yes, she told me."

BB-8 whirred and beeped.

“She told me that too.”

BB-8 made a long, low, droning sound.

“I don’t know. I have to be able to trust her again before I even consider that,” Rey shook her head, “But... it’s nice to know, honestly.”

BB-8 looked back at the Fury with Rey, as if to appear as deep in thought as Rey was. He cautiously beeped at her once again.

Rey felt a smile creep at the corner of her lips. “Yes, you can still like her. You’re not the one she lied to,” she assured him.

A relieved wooing came from the droid, and he cheerfully circled laps around Rey's feet.

Aliana woke up at the crack of dawn. Having gone to sleep during D’Qar’s midday, she did the math and realized she’d been asleep for eighteen hours. She still felt drained, but she’d need meditation for that. At the very least she wasn’t sore and stretched to her breaking point. She pulled herself out of her bed and pulled a robe around her body as she shuffled out into the Fury’s main living space.

“2V,” she mumbled, “Could you set up a ration pack, please?”

“At once, my Lady!” he said with his usual chipper tone before making his way to the kitchen. “And if I might say, It’s wonderful to see you feeling better.”

Aliana nodded and made her way to the dining table. As she took her seat, her mind drifted back to the first meal she and Rey shared together at this spot. She felt a smile grow on her lips at how pleasant the memory was. If she could ever get to that point with Rey again, she was fairly certain she could die happy at that point. Even if nothing more ever came from their relationship together.

2V returned with a tray of polystarch and veg-meat. Simple, but Aliana wasn’t in the mood to either cook or teach 2V how to cook, “Thanks,” she said, motioning for 2V to sit down as she took the tray, “Can I make a change to your programming?”

2V turned to look at Aliana. “You are well within your liberties to do so, my Lady,” he responded. “Although, might I ask what change you intend to make?”

“First, any classified information in your databanks is to be given to Rey whenever she asks for it,” Aliana said, “All misdirections and cover-stories are to be erased. If she asks you a question, you give an honest answer even if it would contradict me.”

2V tilted his head slightly. “My programming as it currently stands dictates to ask that you are absolutely certain you wish to make this change, my Lady. In my centuries of serving your family, I’ve come to understand the Sith’s need for a certain degree of discretion.”

“I’m absolutely certain,” Aliana nodded, “Rey is to have full access to your entire repository of information, and that includes how to open the Crystal containers and the Holocron cabinet.”

2V was silent for a moment, saved for the wiring in his head being slightly louder than usual. After a moment, the droid then nodded. “Acknowledged. My programming has been updated, my Lady. Miss Rey shall have access to all the information at my disposal.”

“Thank you,” Aliana smiled, “The second change I want to make is that I don’t want you to call me ‘my Lady’ or ‘Lady Amorosa’ anymore. I’d rather you call me Alie.”

2V was silent once again as his processing core made the update. “Acknowledge. The update has been made... Miss Alie,” he replied.

“Thank you,” Aliana smiled, finally taking a bite of her breakfast. It was stale, as ration packs typically were, but it would do.

“General, Miss Rey, the cross-referencing is complete,” 3PO said with a delighted air to his voice, “Based on comparisons to the fragment of the map to the Fury’s astrogation charts, Master Luke is most likely on the planet at the very edge of the Outer Rim.”

Rey rushed over to the holoterminal where the map was. Her eyes frantically scanned over the hologram, looking for the planet 3PO was talking about. “Where!?” she asked

Leia approached the terminal with a more casual step, her eyes quickly falling on where the Fury’s charts and the map acquired by BB-8 overlapped. She reached out a hand and pointed Rey’s attention to the planet. “That one.”

“The planet is mostly oceanic, but with a small village located on the southern hemisphere,” 3PO explained as he read out the information from the Fury, “The Fury’s databanks list its exploration just before the fall of the Republic, by a Sith named Darth Alora.”

“A planet strong in the dark side then,” Leia said. “I can’t believe I’m saying this, but Amorosa’s information was good. Everything checks out.”

“So we go find him now, right?” Rey turned to Leia. “We find Master Skywalker, we bring him back and we’ll be okay to go?”

“...If he wants to come back,” Leia said solemnly. “If he’s been gone this long and tried this hard to remain hidden, there’s no telling if he’ll even want to return.”

The flourish of hope Rey began to feel started to wilt just as quickly. “So... what do we do?”

Leia’s somber frown turned into a soft smile as she looked at Rey. “Perhaps Luke will be what we need him to be,” she said placing a hand on Rey’s shoulder. “And what you need, my dear, is a teacher.”

Rey’s eyes widened at the prospect, “You mean-?”

“Go find Luke. Convince him to teach you the ways of the Force,” Leia smiled, “Learn from him, and become a Jedi.”

Rey looked from Leia to the holoterminal, unsure of what to say. It was clear she could use the Force, but the idea of learning to be a Jedi... she hadn’t actually given it that much thought. She’d assumed that Luke would become like Aliana, a powerful weapon to use against the First Order.

Becoming that kind of power herself... “Do you think I’m ready for something like that?” she asked softly.

“I know you are, Rey” Leia said enthusiastically. “You have power. You have potential. But most importantly, you have a good heart. The Force brought you here, to us, with this power, for a reason. Let the Force guide you to your destiny.”

“But...” Rey winced as she remembered much of what she’d done on Starkiller Base. She didn’t know a lot about the Force, but she knew strangling someone and letting her anger out like she had during the duel screamed Dark Side, “...Leia, there’s something I have to tell you. On Starkiller Base, I used the Dark Side to get out of captivity and in the fight against Kylo Ren.”

A flicker of disappointment crossed Leia’s expression before she replaced it with her soft maternal smile. “You spent a great deal of your time with a Sith Lord,” Leia said. “It makes sense that her influence had an effect on you. All the more reason for you to be the one to find Luke, so you can learn how to use the Force like a Jedi. He will set you on the right path.”

Something about what Leia said rubbed Rey the wrong way. Aliana had been careful not to use the Force around her before Starkiller Base, and had even used her hands to strangle Kylo Ren when he boarded the Fury. The most she’d taught her was how to wield a sword, and by extension lightsaber. Regardless, she let it slide for now. “What are you going to have Aliana do?” Rey asked, concerned about how the Sith was recovering.

Leia couldn’t help but allow a look of exasperation to grow on her face. “... If I could help it, I would simply send Aliana on her way at this point,” she said plainly. “Her assistance has been helpful, but it’s far too dangerous for us to be relying on a Sith at this stage of our operations. It certainly wouldn’t win us any Republic support if they found out.”

“In the interest of fairness, Princess,” 3PO interjected. “The Hosnian system as we know it would have been completely destroyed were it not for Lord Amorosa’s intervention.”

“Leia... you did tell them that, didn’t you?” Rey asked. She was deeply concerned about the implications that Leia might have left Aliana’s halting of the plasma beam out of her report to the Republic, “She saved billions of people and bought the Resistance enough time to blow up the base. That shouldn’t be left out.”

Leia’s frown deepened, briefly turning to glare at 3PO before turning back to Rey. “We may have omitted the speculative pieces of information we ascertained from the attack. I’ll be sure to update them with a revised report as soon as I can.”

“Shall I tend to that now, Princess?” 3PO inquired.

“Later,” Leia stressed to the droid. “We have more pressing issues at the moment.

Rey wasn’t satisfied, but didn’t press the issue any further, “So about what you’re going to do with Aliana?”

Leia’s mouth pressed into a thin line as she pondered. “... I suppose she is free to do as she pleases now,” Leia said. “She didn’t aid us under any professional obligation and I have no orders to give her so perhaps that just expires whatever oral contract she was under.”

Rey's concern only magnified. As much as there was still left to repair between them, she didn't like the idea of just cutting Aliana loose to go back to drifting. Especially when they had no idea what kind of help she would be in the future. Just sending her on her way felt... heartless. She didn't have much time to think about it as the Sith herself walked into the control room, looking a lot more refreshed and less like she'd just been run over by the Falcon.

"You slept for a while," Rey smiled.

"I needed it," Aliana nodded, "How're you holding up?"

"Better now," Rey said, pointing to the holomap. "We think we just found Skywalker."

Aliana glanced at the holomap, and her eyes widened at the planet on display, "Ahch To? That's a weird place to hide. That planet's smackd right in the middle of Hutt space. Skywalker has guts, I'll give him that. So what's the plan?"

"Rey will take the Falcon to Ahch To," Leia stated plainly. "If she fails to bring him back to the Republic, she can still learn the ways of the Force from him. Either way, we'll have a Jedi against the First Order." The look Leia gave Aliana as she spoke was odd. Not antagonistic inherently, but certainly... challenging.

Aliana glanced at Rey, "You're going to become a Jedi?" she asked, raising an eyebrow. Not in a confused way, Rey realized, in an inquisitive way.

Rey shrugged. "...I guess it's my destiny or something? Like the Force guided me here to this place in the time of need or... Leia gave this whole speech, it seemed very inspiring at the time."

Aliana's brow furrowed. She didn't like the idea of the Force pushing Rey into one particular direction. She'd always viewed the Force as a tool. Something to make use of. The Jedi's insistence on letting the Force dictate their actions felt about as short-sighted as the reverence they placed on their lightsabers. "But do you *want* to be a Jedi?" Aliana asked.

Rey looked down at her feet. Honestly she wasn't sure that becoming a Jedi was right for her. She wasn't as averse to the idea as she was when Maz suggested it to her on Takodana, but something about it didn't seem right to her. Perhaps it was the idea of failure? She had already felt the pull of the Dark Side on Starkiller Base. Was it too late for her to become a Jedi? Her mind buzzed with questions and conflicting feelings. Eventually Rey looked back up at Aliana. "I honestly don't know," Rey said. "But regardless, me becoming a Jedi is still Plan B. We have to see if we can bring Master Skywalker back into the fight first. If not? ... Then we'll see what happens."

Aliana smiled, satisfied with Rey's pragmatism, "Alright. So... you might be spending several months on Ahch To at the most?"

Rey nodded, "I guess so."

"Could..." Aliana looked down at the holoterminal, wringing her hands, "Can I come with you?"

Rey's eyes widened at Aliana's words. "You want to come with me?" she asked incredulously before they narrowed slightly in suspicion. "...Why?"

"I..." Aliana started to look visibly nervous as she struggled to look Rey in the eye, "...The last time I let you go without following you, you were captured and tortured by the First Order. I guess

I just don't want to risk that happening again. I know I'm probably being paranoid, but... I really want to come with you if you'll let me."

Rey was silent for a moment before looking over at Leia and 3PO. "Could you give us a minute, please?"

Leia nodded and made her way out of the room, all but dragging the droid out with her.

With that, Rey's attention turned back to Aliana. "OK, so if I agree to this and bring you with me, you would be fine spending months alone on an island with a Jedi Master?"

Rey could see Aliana's eyes widen at what she very clearly had not considered, and her hands started to tremble. An odd reaction to be sure. Aliana took a deep breath and closed her eyes, "Honestly? No. I... don't like being around Jedi Masters if I can help it. But... I'd rather do that than worry about you."

"Is there something you're leaving out of that?" Rey asked, her eyes narrowing.

Aliana nodded, "It's very personal, and I'm not ready to talk about it if that's okay."

Rey's frown deepened. She knew Aliana was holding something back but she only knew that because she just said so. She couldn't get mad at her for lying. She would rather Aliana just tell her so she wouldn't have to spend months agonizing over what it would be... but at the same time, she was still hoping to win back Rey's trust, with no guarantee of when that would be. Rey certainly couldn't throw any stones in that regard.

She had one final question. "... And if you do come along, and I decide to learn how to be a Jedi from Skywalker, you won't do anything to interfere with that, will you?"

"Not at all," Aliana shook her head, "I have no issue with you becoming a Jedi at all. If possible, I'd like to help where I can. My ship has a lot of Jedi and Sith Holocrons, and a supply of lightsaber parts including crystals. If you wanted to make use of them that is. But if you'd rather I stay back and just observe I will..."

Rey blinked. That part was surprisingly easy. With all that laid out and established she couldn't think of any logistical reason she would protest, other than Skywalker possibly protesting. But Aliana seemed like she really wanted to come along and Leia would allow her to drift back into solitude otherwise. "... Alright," Rey said with a nod. "You can come with me."

Aliana gave her a smile that was so warm and heartfelt, Rey actually felt unbalanced by it. She nodded happily and reached a hand out toward her, before stopping and clenching it as she withdrew it, "Thanks. I really appreciate that."

"No problem," Rey said with a nod, her eyes shifting side to side somewhat awkwardly. "Well... I'll go get ready for the journey. It may not be a weapon of a Jedi, but I'll be damned if I go anywhere without my staff if I can help it."

"Actually a lot of Jedi and Sith used lightsaber staves as weapons," Aliana remarked as she followed Rey toward the landing pads, as their ships were docked beside one another.

Rey stopped in her tracks and looked at Aliana. "Really? Like... a lightsaber but it's a staff?" Rey asked, a sparkle threatening to form in her eyes.

Aliana nodded, "I might have a shell for one on the Fury to show you, but the general idea is that it's made of either a longer hilt or two lightsabers fastened together, and extends a blade on each side while the wielder holds it by the centre."

Rey pictured what Aliana was describing in her head and her expression was something one could only describe as wonder.

As they walked through the base, they passed the entrance to the medbay. Rey stopped to look at the entrance to look into it. "... Once second," she said before walking inside. She turned to see Finn, laid out on one of the beds, still unconscious. She walked over to him, gently brushing a hand over his face. "We'll be back. I promise." She said softly before leaning over to place a gentle kiss on his cheek.

She looked up when she noticed Aliana had followed her, and had a hand on Finn's shoulder.

"Thank you for everything you've done," she whispered quietly, squeezing his shoulder, "You'd better be awake by the time we get back. I miss you already."

Rey couldn't help but smile at Aliana as she spoke. She stood back up and made her way out of the medbay to gather her supplies. Aliana separated from her to prep the Fury for launch and have 2V clean Rey's quarters. While the idea of being on the same planet as Luke Skywalker filled her with dread, the fact that Rey would also be there quelled any anxiety she was feeling. She looked over at 2V and smiled. She'd have to tell Rey that she had full access to the Fury's database, though that also included information she wasn't ready to share.

She sighed and resigned herself to simply hoping that Rey respected her privacy and didn't just pry into everything she could just because she could. As long as she was honest about there being things she didn't want to talk about, she was certain that it wouldn't be a problem.

"2V, when you're done with Rey's quarters, could you dig out the training saberstaff?" she called out from the cockpit.

"Right away, Miss Alie!" 2V said dutifully. In truth, while it was a small thing, it was nice to hear 2V address Aliana so casually. As Un-Sith like as it might seem to others, she wasn't especially fond of being referred to as 'my Lady'. At least not with people she considered herself close to. 2V was practically family to her, and now with the proper adjustments made, it felt more like that.

"Should I tidy up the work room as I fetch the staff, Miss Alie?" 2V asked.

"If you feel so inclined," Aliana replied.

"Very well, then I shall tidy up the work room!" 2V nodded.

Aliana returned to punching in Ahch To's coordinates. There was a lot of Hyperspace Traffic, stars and planets in the way of a direct route, causing Aliana to plot a longer route that would add two days to the trip in order to get around all of it. She sighed as she realized there would need to be three fuel stops on the journey and she resolved to find a way to increase the Fury's fuel capacity at some point before the war was over.

Aliana's mind was abuzz with newly formed anxieties. Whereas before the idea of just having Rey aboard the ship filled her joy, now she didn't know what to expect. Would she somehow make the

situation worse in the short time they were locked together inside the Fury? Would Rey demand that Aliana leave the moment they arrive on Ahch To? Would something even worse happen.

Exaggerated fears began to grow and fester in her mind. It was then that the voice of her mother came to the forefront of her mind.

“Fear is a powerful weapon, Star. Powerful enough that it can be used against you. You must not let that happen. Control your fear. Harness it. Make it work for you. You are the master of your own mind. Not anyone else. Not even the Force.”

Aliana recited her mother's teachings to herself under her breath. She would not let her fears control her. She would take them and form something constructive with them. She would make sure to give Rey everything she needed during this journey. She would give Rey no further reason to distrust her. She would put her own trust in Rey to appreciate her efforts and respect her privacy. She would make this happen because she was the master of herself.

She lifted herself back up from the star map and looked around. Her mother was nowhere in sight despite how clearly she heard her voice just a moment ago. She knew it was just a memory. Sith were seldom given the privilege of life beyond death. At least in the way that Jedi were.

No, the Sith's true path to immortality laid in preserving their knowledge through Holocrons. Something Aliana hoped to do herself one day.

Rey stepped onto the Fury, nervous about the prospect of travelling with Aliana. It wasn't due to her distrust, as she'd made her peace with the fact that Aliana was determined to make things right between them and she'd been trying to relax enough to let her try. No, it was the prospect of such close proximity to the Sith. As much as things were tense between them, she still found herself unable to take her eyes off of her at times. Even when she was pouring her heart out and explaining herself, Rey had found herself staring at her beautiful eyes.

She shook her head and groaned. She couldn't let her attraction to the Sith get in the way of what was important. She had to stick to her guns and make Aliana earn the trust she had previously been freely given.

As she stepped into the Fury's main living space, she was greeted by 2V-R8, “Good morning, Miss Rey! Alie has asked me to inform you that you have been granted full access to the Fury's databanks, including the historical records, security recordings, personal logs of all the previous occupants, and the history of events that have taken place around previous occupants. I have also been asked to inform you that several entries are gated with a warning that they pertain to elements of Alie's personal life. She would prefer to inform you of these herself when she is ready, though they are not locked. Are there any questions that were not sufficiently answered the last time you were aboard?”

Rey was surprised at what 2V had told her, to put it mildly. It seemed when Aliana promised no more secrets she really meant it. Well, apart from the ‘personal warning’ parts. She took a moment to consider. She could ask these 2V for everything she wished to know about Aliana regardless of how personal it was, and with nothing left to hide, Rey could be that much closer to trusting her.

Despite that reasoning, the thought of invading Aliana's privacy like that didn't sit well in her stomach, regardless of having the capacity to do that. It would mean more to Rey if she heard it from Aliana's mouth anyway.

That just left any other questions she might want to ask. "...Aliana was raised by her mother, yes?" Rey inquired finally. "What was she like?"

"Oh! Darth Mayrik was one of the wisest Sith to ever walk this ship's deck," 2V explained as he followed Rey to her quarters to tell her the story as she settled in, "She was very strong in the Force and taught Alie to weaponize her passions for greater power. She was also quite kind to myself, and gave me more tune-ups than any other Sith to have owned this ship. I'm certain her daughter would do the same if she was capable of repairing droids, but she has inherited her mother's kindness toward myself nonetheless."

Kindness. That wasn't a word Rey would attribute to Sith before she met Aliana. If what 2V had told her about Darth Mayrik was true, then it wasn't an accident. There was kindness to be found among Sith. Something unquestionably good.

"...Thank you, 2V. That's everything," she said.

"Of course, Miss Rey," 2V said happily as he turned to leave Rey alone in her quarters, "Alie would also like me to ask what you would like for dinner this evening."

That was something that Rey hadn't considered. The thought of tasting Aliana's cooking once more nearly made her mouth water. "...I would like soup, actually," she said.

"I will inform her at once!" 2V said as he finally left her alone.

Rey set her bag down and sat on the bed. The echoes of what used to be a Crew Quarters could be seen, but the conversions to a true personal quarters were drastic. Frankly, it was similar to a small apartment on a city planet with almost all of the proper amenities. Even a personal shower. She was never certain exactly who made these modifications, but she knew it couldn't have been Aliana. The poor woman could barely work a Fuel Converter.

She giggled to herself as she remembered just how tech-illiterate she actually was. Was a lightsaber really the only thing she could build and repair? It must have said something about how important the tool was to her if she could overcome her own shortcoming to maintain it. A thought entered Rey's mind, but she quickly discarded it. Aliana couldn't have possibly lied about her own tech-illiteracy. She saw her fumble with a locked fuel converter for 20 minutes and became genuinely frustrated at the matter. That sort of anger could not have been fabricated. Rey had to be careful not to suspect everything Aliana said or did to be a lie, or else nothing would get better between them.

She laid down on the bed as the last few thoughts clicked. She *did* want things to get better between them. She *wanted* to trust Aliana again. She was nervous and anxious sure, but she did want Aliana to be her friend. She didn't want to hold a grudge forever. Especially not toward someone who seemed to genuinely care about her. Maybe she should engage with her more. Ask her more questions, just out of curiosity. It would be a long trip to Ahch To, and she was going there to learn about the Force. There was a Master of the Force right here on the ship. At the very least she could learn *something*.

She rolled over and smiled as she found herself committed to this idea. At the very least she wanted to see that lightsaber.

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Most of Those Women's Names

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Okay, take this and be careful,” Aliana said as she handed what looked like two lightsabers connected to a center clasp, “Training sabers can’t hurt you, but they do still *hurt* .”

Rey nodded and took the double bladed weapon into her hand. Cautiously she tightened her grip on it and assumed a battle stance she ordinarily took with her own staff. “Like this?” she asked.

Aliana corrected her stance so that her thumbs were pointed inward toward each other and the rear blade would point behind her, “There we go, that’s better. Alright now... activate both sabers.”

Rey turned the ignition and two crimson blades of light popped from both ends in unison. The sight alone made Rey’s eyes sparkle in delight. She gave it an experimental twirl and moved through a few basic staff attacks. It wasn’t a completely identical experience to her staff, as she had to grip only the center which left many of her longer-reaching attacks useless to her. But the elegance to twirling it made her think of new ways to strike. The whole concept made her giddy, it was like a lightsaber that was made specifically for her.

Unfortunately, in her giddiness she twirled it at the wrong angle and clipped the back of her head with the blade. Aliana was right about training sabers being painful, as the back of her head stung like she’d just been zapped with a stun-stick.

“Oop! Careful now!” Aliana said with a sympathetic wince. “Try to keep the blade to the front of you for now.”

Rey quickly recovered and nodded at Aliana. She resumed her stance and began going through the motions of her strikes a little more slowly. Her motions felt slightly more stiff and restricted but at least she wasn’t zapping herself so much now.

“This weapon is tricky to master,” Aliana said reassuringly. “Don’t beat yourself up if you don’t master it overnight.”

“I didn’t feel this clumsy when I was fighting Kylo Ren,” Rey said with a grunt.

“Using a lightsaber involves a lot of trust in your own capabilities,” Aliana explained. “It’s harder to doubt yourself in the midst of an anger induced rush like you had on Starkiller base.”

“I was curious,” Rey said as she practiced swinging and twirling the lightsaber in ways that wouldn’t accidentally clip her, “What exactly was that? It felt like I wasn’t even really paying attention, but just... letting go and letting something else take hold of me.”

“You were channeling your anger and hatred into the Force,” Aliana explained, “Some Sith like to call it Force Fury or Force Rage, others called it Bloodlust, but the general theme is the same. Emotions like anger, hatred, passion, love and fear all fuel the Dark Side of the Force, and when built up over a long period of time or a period of intense stress, it can lead to this rush of power when it’s finally released as you let the Dark Side flow through you completely. It’s one of the most overwhelming tactics a Sith has in a lightsaber duel, especially against a Jedi.”

Rey listened intently as she continued to go through the motions. She allowed the Dark Side to flow through her completely. She felt as though that thought should terrify her, yet it didn't. Even after supposedly succumbing to the darkness within herself, she was still... well, herself. She felt like the same Rey as before all of this happened. The only difference being she was just a little wiser and more cautious.

"So... is that what you did on Starkiller base too?" Rey asked before practicing a twirl. "Channel the Dark Side completely to stop that beam?"

"Yes, but I didn't channel my anger or hatred toward the First Order," Aliana said, wringing her hands nervously, "They were... insufficient. I had to immerse myself in something else in order to achieve that much strength."

Rey's brow furrowed as she tried to understand what Aliana was getting at. What emotion would have been strong enough for her to stop a weapon that powerful in its tracks. "...Was it... your fear?" she guessed. "Your fear of losing me or something? ...Oh, God. That sounded narcissistic, didn't it?"

Aliana laughed sheepishly, "No, but the truth is going to sound a lot more pathetic and corny," she winced as she looked away, "You... remember how one of the emotions I listed as fueling the Dark Side was love?"

Rey nodded, and Aliana found herself unable to finish the sentence despite it no longer being a secret between them and just rotated her hand in a 'put two and two together' motion.

"Oh!" Rey said, the faint tint of pink in her cheeks being concealed by the glow of the training saber. She understood and accepted that Aliana was in love with her, even if it made her own thoughts and desires to remain objective in this tenuous part of their relationship more complicated. Wanting to not dwell on that idea too long, she considered a way to shift the conversation ever so slightly.

"I suppose that's another thing that confused me," Rey said. "Love being a powerful emotion makes sense. But the idea of it being tied to the Dark Side... would the Jedi see something like love to be evil? I can't understand why they would think that."

"Love is... a very personal feeling. And the Jedi, and the Light Side, tend to focus more on being centered and objective," Aliana said, sitting down on a crate, "The Jedi have had bans on love for thousands of years because they viewed those attachments as interfering with a Jedi's judgment. And handled poorly, it leads to openings to manipulate someone. It's ultimately what caused Anakin Skywalker to fall. But it's also not entirely... pure of an emotion. Love can be... possessive, callous and selfish just as much as it can be affectionate and wonderful."

Aliana stared down at the floor as she tried to think of an example that would solidify what she was trying to say, "Say that someone made the choice to save the one they loved, but that decision resulted in the deaths of thousands of people. You can debate whether it's an evil decision or not, but it is the kind of attachment that fuels the Dark Side of the Force."

"...Huh, I see," Rey said, her expression conveying that she was deep in thought. "... So... love... while powerful, is neither inherently good or evil. It all depends on how you choose to act upon it. Like... like the Dark Side... right?" she guessed, assuming this lesson was supposed to tie everything together somehow.

Aliana nodded, “The Jedi believe the Dark Side to be an inherently corrupting influence because it’s at its most dangerous when fueled by fear. And there’s nothing the Jedi are more afraid of than the Dark Side itself.”

“Oooohhh,” Rey said, recognizing the pattern. “I’m starting to see why the Sith were so good at.. Jedi killing.” She tried shifting her focus back to training, wanting to make sure her training staff didn’t hit anything around her or herself.

“So, if you don’t mind me asking,” Rey prompted in the middle of a strike. “What’s the difference between a Sith Lord and... whatever Kylo Ren was?”

“Kylo Ren is a Dark Jedi. He’s a Jedi who fell to the Dark Side. But he doesn’t train in the ways of the Sith, he knows nothing of the Sith Code, and his knowledge of the Dark Side is fragmented at best,” Aliana explained, “The Sith is an ideal. The Dark Side is not synonymous with that. Much like the Jedi and the Light Side, they’re not inherently linked to one another. There are many Force Users who are neither Jedi or Sith but use the Force anyway.”

“I see,” Rey said, starting to wonder if she should be writing any of this down or if that was what the ‘holocrons’ she mentioned are for. “What is the Sith Code then?”

Aliana smiled and cleared her throat as she recited the Sith Code, “Peace is a lie, there is only Passion. Through Passion, I gain Strength. Through Strength, I gain Power. Through Power, I gain Victory. Through Victory, my chains are broken. The Force shall set me free.”

“Wow,” Rey said surprised. “That’s not as... incriminating as I thought it would be.” She adjusted her positioning and repeated the motions, her mind’s eye seeing blaster bolts that she could deflect away. “I suppose... if learning to be a Jedi doesn’t work out... becoming a Sith might not be too bad.”

Aliana’s smile grew slightly wider and she became excited at the prospect of Rey choosing to become a Sith. She tried not to let it show too much, lest Rey think she was trying to coerce her. But the idea was something that filled her with absolute joy.

“Possibly,” Aliana nodded, standing up, “2V says we’ll come out of Hyperspace in two days. The pouch you brought with you from Jakku is in the cargo hold in a locker. I wasn’t sure if it was important, so I brought it after you were captured.”

“Oh good,” Rey said, turning to look at the doorway Aliana spoke of. “I was hoping I didn’t lose those on Takodana. There one of the few things I can call my own.” She spoke casually, in a faint semblance of how they used to talk before Starkiller base. Similar, but not the same. Stilted, uncertain. As though they were walking on a sheet of ice that cracked with every step. Without the emotional rush Rey had felt during and immediately after the battle, it was difficult to be outright venomous to Aliana. Especially when she was still being so considerate.

Though that didn’t stop her from keeping the Sith at arms length. Especially when she still didn’t know why Aliana was still being so nice.

“Ahh! Dark Lady!” 2V said as he came off the bridge. “I’d hoped you hadn’t gone very far! There is a small rupture in the starboard coolant tank.”

“Just patch it up, 2V,” Aliana sighed. “Please. I’m not in the position to go inspecting it, and I wouldn’t know what I’m looking for either way.”

“Very well, Dark Lady,” 2V nodded before scurrying away.

Rey narrowed her eyes at Aliana as he left. “You have your droid call you ‘Dark Lady’?” she asked.

“According to my mother it kicked in shortly after the Empire fell,” Aliana shrugged. “She couldn’t get him to stop, and he moved it onto me after she died. Even with new programming it still kicks in from time to time.”

“...Ah,” Rey said before falling silent again. Silently, she was questioning why exactly she had drawn attention to that. Was she looking for something beyond a clarification? A reason to stay angry, perhaps? To get riled up at Aliana again. Possibly. The reason why didn’t matter, ultimately, as the response Aliana gave halted that plan dead in its tracks. Rey felt her jaw clenched, her fingers drumming against the backrest of the sofa. By the Force, was she getting frustrated over having nothing to be angry about.

The silence hung over them for a moment longer. Rey looked back up to see Aliana making an effort to look at anything other than her.

“...You gotta be careful with patching up coolant,” she said, breaking the silent. “If you don’t use the right material, it can erode into the liquid and cause problems with the engine.”

“I’ll let 2V know,” Aliana nodded. “He knows more about the ship than I do. I think he uses... what was it... Duranium? Same stuff I build lightsabers out of.”

“Not a bad alloy to use,” Rey conceded. “The only thing better would be impervium actually.” Another beat of silence passed before she looked back at Aliana. “...I could take a look at it,” she offered. “Not that I’m doubting 2V’s capabilities or anything. It’s just... there’s a lot that needed fixing on this ship when I got here.”

“You sure?” Aliana asked. “I mean not that I’m not appreciative, but are you sure you’re alright with fixing up my ship?”

“Well... it will give me something to do,” Rey said with a shrug. “Not exactly good just sitting on my hands for long periods of time, you know?”

Aliana nodded and smiled warmly at her. “Yeah, I know. I get antsy too. My mother said I had a condition.”

Rey cocked a brow. “A condition?” she asked. “Are you sick?”

“No, not sick. Just... my brain works differently,” Aliana shrugged. “I’d get antsy as a kid, do the same thing over and over again, I’d catch myself humming like all the time. Drove my mother up the wall for a while. Also I’m told I space out.”

“...Oh yeah,” Rey mused. “I’ve noticed that too. I didn’t know that was considered a condition. I just thought that was a thing you did.”

“Apparently if you do enough of them, it officially has a name,” Aliana shrugged.

Rey pursed her lips slightly, her thoughts retreating inward. “I like keeping my hands busy,” she said, looking at her drumming fingers. “If I don’t have something to work on, I just... fidget until I

can find something. There are times where I can focus on something for maybe a minute, but then there are things that I can focus on for days on end. When I built my speeder back on Jakku, I didn't stop until it was finished. Took me a day and a half. I had leftover portions that day because I skipped a meal. Is that a... thing?"

"Yeah, kinda sounds like it," Aliana giggled softly. "Welcome to the club I guess. There's probably a name for it in the Republic, but I have no idea."

"Well alright then," Rey said, a small smile tugging at her lips. "I just... kind of figured people were just built this way. Like, that was the reason that we built ships powerful enough to traverse the stars. Because we couldn't just sit around and do nothing."

"Some people like to sit around and do nothing," Aliana smiled. "Others don't. Everyone's got their own deal. I'm gonna check our route and then get started on dinner." She turned the corner and disappeared into the cockpit, leaving Rey alone with her thoughts.

She decided to shift her focus back to her practice. She imagined projectiles to deflect, swings to parry and enemies to strike. At one point she envisioned Kylo Ren once more. She saw him as he was when she left him beaten in the snow. Sniveling, pathetic and so positively loathsome. She began to feel anger well up in her once more as she swung her lightsaber at his imaginary face, picturing another scar to the one she gave him before. Much to her surprise, it felt as though the blade made contact with something solid, causing her to lose her balance slightly. She staggered, almost falling over, prompting her to reach out with a hand and catch herself on the wall. She began breathing heavily, unsure as to what had just happened. She looked down at her training weapon and then she looked up where she envisioned Kylo Ren just now. He was gone. She could still imagine him being there, but for some reason it didn't feel as clear as it did a moment ago. Almost...

Almost as if he were actually there.

The thought made Rey's stomach twist in disgust and rage. She deactivated the training staff and placed it onto the table. She could vividly recall a similar experience back on Takodana where she could have sworn that someone, who she now recognized as Kylo Ren, had been watching her and Aliana talk. It couldn't just be a coincidence. What did that grease stain do to her? She thought about asking Aliana, but thought better of it. Perhaps this would go away in time and she wouldn't be seeing flashes of someone she despised. She quietly hoped she was just having flashbacks and that it wasn't anything more serious. Perhaps it was a side effect of channeling her anger so intensely at him before. It was starting to leave... aftershocks or something of the like. Perhaps there were some Jedi techniques to help quell such things. She would have to remember to ask Master Skywalker when they reached Ahch To. In the meantime it was best to just not think about that revolting scumbag.

She looked up in time to see Aliana coming out of the cockpit and thanked her internally for providing a comfortable distraction. The Sith smiled at her and sat back down on the same crate she had been, looking from Rey to the lightsaber on the table, "Finished already?"

Rey's head scrambled for something to tell Aliana other than what actually happened a moment ago. "... I... accidentally hit myself in the head again," she said, rubbing her temple. "I figured that was enough for now. Rather not risk brain damage or anything."

"Fair enough," Aliana smiled, standing up from the crate, "You want dinner?"

Rey perked up and nodded emphatically.

“Alright, coming right up,” Aliana smiled, retreating to the cargo hold where her cooking station was set up, once again leaving Rey alone with her thoughts. She almost regretted nodding so quickly because now the distraction she was craving was gone.

‘It wasn’t real,’ Rey said inwardly. ‘You just imagined it. That creature wasn’t really in front of you just now. You just got worked up is all. Just relax and think about... dinner.’ With that, her thoughts roamed to Aliana’s cooking. Her dishes always found ways to be creative and delicious with whatever ingredients they had. Hell, even her polystarch tasted better than anyone else’s. How was that possible?

Her first thought was the Force, and in fact she had never actually watched Aliana cook before. Aliana just kept surprising her. But her talent for creating something delicious out of what was considered to be the most cheap and utilitarian food in the galaxy continued to elude Rey. In fact, she was actually quite curious and got up to follow Aliana into the cargo hold. As she stepped inside she saw a fair share of non perishable goods, standard ration portions, condensed fruits, veg meats, and energy capsules. It looked like Aliana had refreshed her supplies of ingredients on D’Qar before they took off. She could tell that the ingredients themselves weren’t bewitched to be unfathomably delicious, so that meant it was all in the way that Aliana put them together. Aliana glanced back from what looked to Rey like an improvised stove top and smiled.

“Did you need something?” she asked as she sliced through a few dried vegetables with a vibroknife before throwing them into a large pot. Before Rey could answer, she immediately transitioned to a bowl filled with polystarch powder and started sprinkling in a brown looking powder before setting the mixture into a canister of water.

“Oh, no it’s just...” Rey took a second to try and phrase her thoughts in a way that didn’t sound weird. “I never saw you cook the whole time I’ve been on this ship. I was... curious I suppose.”

Aliana smiled brightly, “Thanks,” she said as she beckoned Rey closer, “Come here. I’m making that soup you liked. It’s actually nothing special, just vegetables and veg-meat chunks simmered in water and spices. You can make soup out of pretty much anything you have on hand if you’re crafty enough. A bit of polystarch powder or rice and it turns into a really thick and hearty stew.”

Rey observed Aliana’s work, the smell of the food nearly making her mouth water. As Aliana mentioned the possibility of stew she felt her stomach rumble. “Oh that sounds delicious,” she said, audibly yearning for the food. She still couldn’t fathom how delicious Aliana’s cooking was even as the other woman so casually explained the process to her.

“You know, it’s a long trip to Ahch To,” Aliana shrugged, “I could teach you how to cook if you want.”

“Oh! Well... if it’s not too much trouble, I would love to learn.” Rey said gingerly. “It would be nice to know how to cook like you wherever I am.”

“Alright. Tomorrow I’ll get you involved in making breakfast and show you how to cook,” Aliana smiled as she turned her attention to the polystarch which had fully absorbed the water and formed into a large bun. She broke it into four pieces and placed two on a plate which also held a large bowl, “Soup won’t be ready for another hour, it has to simmer. But the part where I have to actually be in here is over,” she said as she put a lid on the pot.

Rey nodded and followed Aliana out of the storage room and into the dining area. Her eyes were transfixed on the polystarch the entire time. She had to resist the urge to just reach out and grab one of the two pieces.

The logical part of Rey's mind seemed to comprehend that food was most certainly one of her blind spots that Aliana was very familiar with. It was the very reason the two of them met in the first place. Even so, considering the fact that she was making meals for the both of them, she knew she wouldn't have to keep her guard up necessarily whenever food was involved. Food was a necessity of life and it was simply something the two of them could come to an understanding to.

"... I think one of the things I want to learn to make was... what was that meal you made me called again?" Rey asked. "The first meal? Back on Jakku."

"Oh, cushnip and fral," Aliana smiled as the two of them sat on the sofa together, "It was a recipe I learned from Maz on Takodana. Personal favorite of both of us, actually. I've been making that for... six years? Yeah that sounds about right."

Cushnip and fral. Even the name made Rey want to lick her lips. Before that fateful moment, in this very ship, she was unaware the food could ever have that much flavor. It was nigh-overwhelming the first time she tried it. "Oh yes. I definitely want to learn how to make that next," she said with an easy smile.

Aliana nodded, "I can do that. It'd be fun to teach you how to cook."

"No, the Kyber crystal is what the Jedi like to use, my lightsaber uses a Qixoni crystal," Aliana explained, "It's a completely different creature from the Kyber. I know it makes no sense, but trust me it does."

Rey took a bite of polystarch as Aliana spoke, her brow still furrowed in confusion. "I just-" she began before realizing she still hadn't swallowed. "- Mm, sorry. I just don't understand what the difference is. I mean, they're all just crystals aren't they?"

"Kyber crystals are... weird. They're kinda Force Sensitive and so they become attuned to the wielder and make a lightsaber take on different properties. Even the color is attuned to the wielder in some way," Aliana explained, "Unless you're Sith, in which case you have to do a ritual to make the crystal bleed, it's a whole complicated mess. Other lightsaber crystals like mine are a lot more straightforward. It focuses the beam, and because the crystal is red the lightsaber is red."

Rey rested her chin on the back of her hand as she processed the information. "... Can't say I'm too impressed with the idea of Kyber crystals then," she said. "That'd be like having a hyperdrive that only worked when it felt like it. At that point any benefits it offers are moot because it's unreliable."

"That's exactly what a Kyber crystal is! A lightsaber that only works when it feels like it!" Aliana agreed, "That's why touching my lightsaber didn't give you the freaky flashbacks that Anakin's gave you. It doesn't have a Force sensitive Crystal in it."

Rey shuddered, memories of touching that lightsaber filling her with dread. "Oh, God," she said. "That was just horrible. I don't understand how Master Skywalker could have used that thing."

“I don’t pretend to know why Jedi do anything,” Aliana rolled her eyes, “They used to use normal lightsaber crystals in their lightsabers, but for some reason they decided to go all mystical with it. A lightsaber is a piece of technology, the Jedi just don’t seem to like that idea so they try to make it something only they can use.”

“That sounds... uncharacteristically elitist,” Rey said with a frown. “I am sincerely hoping Master Skywalker isn’t as bad as you tend to make Jedi out to be or else we could have a problem.”

“I don’t know a whole lot about Skywalker’s failed Jedi Order, if I’m being completely honest,” Aliana shrugged, “I’m going by mostly what my grandmother told me of the Old Republic Jedi. The ones that died out as the Empire was rising. And historical texts.”

“I see. Well, in that case, maybe there’s hope yet.” Rey finished the remainder of her polystarch. It was delicious, and back home would have constituted an entire day’s meal. However, either her appetite was bigger than it used to be or her stomach really wanted that soup because she was still hungry for more. “So... how different was your family from Sidious and Vader? Like, as Sith, what was the difference?”

Aliana took a sip of her soup as she pondered the question, “The Sith Order used to be a large and diverse place thousands of years ago. But at some point most of the Sith were killed off by a Sith Lord named Darth Bane. He established the Rule of Two, which stated that there shall be no more than two Sith in the galaxy at any point in time. That’s where the split really happened because he didn’t kill every Sith. Pockets remained throughout the galaxy, living in hiding or in secluded places. My family was one of those pockets. I think the real difference came from the fact that the earliest matriarchs of my family were a Sith *and* a Jedi.”

“Like one woman that was both or just a Jedi and Sith together?” Rey inquired.

“The latter,” Aliana said, setting a holoprojector on the table and projecting an image of a blonde woman in dark grey robes, next to a red-headed woman in a dull green cloak and with several cybernetic limbs, “These are the earliest records anyone has of my family. Lana Beniko, a Sith Lord of a very old Sith Empire, and her wife. A Jedi Master who Lana took to calling Darth Caida.”

Rey eyed the hologram curiously. The two women were strikingly beautiful, to be sure, although there was something about them that stood out to her above anything else.

“They don’t very much look like you,” Rey observed, comparing Aliana’s dark, freckled skin to her much paler ancestors. “How far back are they?”

“Three thousand years,” Aliana smiled, “My mother looks more like me, as does my grandmother. Three hundred generations of having to find new partners to have children with will do that to you.”

“OK that makes sense,” Rey said with a chuckle before turning her gaze back to the hologram before them. “...Did they love each other?” Rey asked. “These two?”

“I did say Caida was her wife,” Aliana smiled, “They loved each other very much. At least, that’s what the Fury’s records show.”

That put a smile on Rey’s face. The idea that not only were the Sith not inherently evil, but that love could blossom between two people as diametrically opposed to one another as a Jedi and Sith. She

suddenly found herself wondering why that thought comforted her. Rather than try and answer that question, she tried reaching for another piece of polystarch to distract herself with only to find that there was none to be found.

“You haven’t touched your soup,” Aliana giggled softly, pushing the bowl closer to her, “But yeah, I really like their story. It’s a nice one to hear. I used to make my mother tell it to me every night when I was little.”

Rey suddenly imagined Aliana as a small child and had to resist the urge to squeal in delight at how adorable the image was. She instead decided to fill her mouth with that delicious soup. It was fortunate that she gave it a moment to cool off or else she likely would have scalded her own tongue. It was just the right temperature for her to fully appreciate the flavor, and how flavorful it was. The spices, vegetables and meats all blended their flavors into the broth resulting in a heavenly savory taste that Rey could practically swim in.

Aliana grinned as she watched Rey truly enjoy her dinner. The last two days she’d seen only anger, rage, fear and anxiety on her face and it was nice to see her actually enjoying herself for the first time since Takodana. Even as they drew closer to Ahch To, the prospect of spending several months in the vicinity of Luke Skywalker didn’t feel so viscerally terrifying as it had when she first thought of it.

She slowly continued sipping her own soup, smiling at how she’d outdone herself this time. She knew using that crushed Dantooine wildflower was a good idea.

Rey happily took another spoonful of soup, relishing in more of it’s wonderful flavor. This soup was wonderful. This moment was wonderful. On board the Fury, with Aliana, even after everything that happened. It was easier to forget about all the problems the galaxy was facing. It was easier to forget that anything had changed between the two of them. Things were still somewhat awkward and distant, but that fact felt... far away. Easier to disregard. Little moments like these, Rey would happily take as much as she could.

Aliana was snapped out of her ‘admiring the pretty Jedi’ daze when 2V tapped her on the shoulder, making her visibly jump out of her seat.

“Alie, pardon the interruption, but it is nearly time for your annual memorial for Darth Mayrik.”

Aliana’s blood ran cold. She’d nearly forgotten. She never forgot! She started to panic as she hurriedly got to her feet, “Uh... okay... put the holoprojector in the cargo hold and gather everything there for me. I uh... I need to get ready. I can’t believe I almost forgot!”

Rey was nothing short of confused by what had transpired before her. She rose from her seat about to ask Aliana what was going on, but thought better of it by how frantic she suddenly appeared to be. She instead walked over to 2V who was gathering the supplies he was set out to acquire. “Um, 2V, what is going on, exactly?” she asked.

“Alie has an annual memorial service for Darth Mayrik, on the day she was murdered,” 2V explained as Aliana zipped across the ship, pulling her cloak on and frantically looking for her lightsaber, “She usually needs no reminder, but she has been quite distracted whenever you are on board, Miss Rey.

That was quite a bit of information for Rey to process, not so much in quantity of information, but weight. She watched as Aliana darted back and forth on the ship, scrambling to get ready for

something she apparently did every year. She didn't know if she should say anything or contribute in some way. This all seemed especially personal to Aliana.

Rey lowered her head and returned to her seat. Another time perhaps, when the two of them were in a better place together. Then she would talk to Aliana about this.

"2V, what exactly happened that day?" she asked quietly.

"I am authorized to tell you, Miss Rey. But I must warn that Alie has requested the names of the Jedi be redacted from this tale," 2V explained.

Rey tilted her head, confused as to why that detail would be important to conceal that sort of information, but decided to brush it off. "Alright fine. Omit the name, just tell me what happened."

"Darth Mayrik and Alie were on Corellia. Mayrik was training Alie in lightsaber combat. Alie would have been fourteen years old at the time," 2V explained, "They were apparently noticed by a Jedi Master and his Padawan and the two became locked into a duel. Normally Darth Mayrik was a master of lightsaber combat, but her attention was divided to ensuring the Padawan didn't kill her daughter. The Padawan was an adult, while Alie was still considered a child by her mother. The Master struck Mayrik down and the Padawan severely wounded Alie before Alie eventually escaped. She was never the same after that day. She has harbored a terrible fear of the two Jedi in particular ever since."

Rey felt her appetite disappear after hearing that story. Her face contorted into one of horror. "That's... that's awful," she said softly. She knew Aliana told her what happened that day, but it was very clear she wasn't comfortable giving the details. She hadn't told her how old she'd actually been, or that the Padawan had been an adult. She assumed they'd both been around seventeen or eighteen. Aliana also hadn't said that she was still terrified of the two Jedi who attacked them. It was at this point that Rey could understand why. She also understood why Aliana's perception of Jedi was as unfavorable as it was. That was not an experience that she could just ignore.

"Truly awful. Darth Mayrik was a wonder Master," 2V agreed, "Alie was left to train herself in the Force after Darth Mayrik's murder, which is why she has such an impressive collection of holocrons. She now marks the day of Darth Mayrik's murder with a memorial in the cargo hold every year."

Aliana skidded by, lightsaber on her belt and sealed herself in the cargo hold with a loud 'BANG' of the door's magnetic seal slamming shut. Rey felt the urge to rush over to the door and make sure that Aliana was alright. Still, the knowledge that it wasn't her place to do so at the time held her still. She instead turned back to 2V and asked, somewhat meekly, "Is she going to be ok?"

"I'm not quite sure," 2V said matter-of-factly, "Alie is usually quite collected and in control of herself, but ever since you came on board she has been far more distracted and clumsy. You are much unlike her previous liaisons."

"What do you mean?" Rey asked genuinely confused at this point. "Who did she travel with before?"

"Oh you mistake me, Miss Rey. Aliana has never traveled with anybody before," 2V explained, "I'm speaking of the women she has brought onto the ship in the past. None usually stay longer than a single night."

“A single night?” the last piece finally clicked in Rey’s head as her cheeks suddenly turned a bold pink. “... Oh,” she said in realization. It made sense, of course. Aliana said that she was attracted to women. “...How... how many other women were there... would you say?” she asked, unable to help herself.

“Seventy-one, Miss Rey,” 2V said with all the casual air of reciting the date.

“Seventy-one,” Rey parroted. “...But I’m the only one who’s been here longer than a single night?” She genuinely wasn’t sure if she should have been touched or offended by that fact. Sure it was nice that Aliana didn’t just have her on board the ship to try anything with her. That was very lady-like of her. At the same time, she felt like she should have made the attempt at some point, if she did indeed love her as she claimed.

Then again, she might not have felt it in good conscious to take Rey to bed with her while she was still lying to her. Another virtuous point that she couldn’t fault her on. Thinking about the whole thing merely made her even more confused and flustered. Rey physically attempted to shake off these thoughts before returning to her unfinished soup.

“Has my information offended you, Miss Rey?” 2V asked, tilting his head at an exact 45 degree angle.

“No no, 2V!” Rey assured him before looking back down at her soup. “It just gave me a... a lot to think about. Don’t worry. I’ll be fine.”

“Very well, Miss Rey!” 2V said happily as he proceeded to the engine room, presumably to do maintenance on the engines, himself, or something to that effect. Rey wasn’t really paying attention.

Rey asked Aliana for nothing but the truth from here on out, and goodness was she receiving a lot of truth. She never thought she would hear how exactly Aliana’s mother died and learn the nature of her love life within the same 10 minutes of each other.

Eventually Rey finished her soup, leaving the empty dishes on the table for 2V later, much to his insistence that it was no problem. Her eyes looked over at the closed door where Aliana was still performing her memorial. Unsure how long that would be, Rey decided to retreat to her quarters. After everything that had happened, the Sith deserved this little time to herself.

“YOU DID WHAT?!” Rey heard a yell from outside her quarters a few hours later, “WHY WOULD YOU DO THAT?!”

“My apologies, Miss Alie, but you did not put a discretion filter on that particular piece of information,” came 2V’s voice.

“I didn’t think I needed to! I didn’t even know you had it!” Aliana yelled, putting her hands over her face as she curled into a ball on the sofa, “I didn’t think my love life would be a topic of conversation between you two! By the Force, I’m so humiliated!” she slammed a fist onto 2V’s shoulder in frustration, “Wipe that information from your database immediately! And all other information pertaining to my love life!”

“Understood,” 2V remarked casually before a moment of quiet. “All information pertaining to Data Log 737-B has been erased. Is there anything else I can assist you with, Alie?”

“Yeah, you can pick up my lightsaber and cut my head off.”

“That would violate my programming regarding Beniko Family Safety.”

“I was being sarcastic. Just leave me alone!”

Rey winced slightly at how upset Aliana was. At the same time she couldn't help but smile at how adorable the other woman was when she was this flustered. She watched as Aliana slumped onto the couch, her hands covering her face. She decided to take a slight risk. If it backfired, she would just give Aliana some privacy for the next few hours.

“Hey, you ok?” she asked, approaching from inside her quarters.

“How much of that did you hear?” Aliana asked without looking up.

“You mean how much of what you and 2V were talking about or what he told me earlier?” Rey asked.

“I already know the latter, and you just answered the former,” Aliana said, still without looking up, “I brought that on myself. I should have put more exceptions to 2V's memory banks.”

“Well you didn't,” Rey remarked. “...And I'm rather touched that you didn't. I... I know things are still shaky between us but... I do appreciate that you still trust me.” She fidgeted for a moment, feeling there was more she could say. “...And for what it's worth, I haven't gone through any of your personal information yet.”

“I'm pretty sure how many women I've slept with counts as personal information,” Aliana said, lifting her head.

“2V didn't seem to think so,” Rey said, offering a weak smile.

“2V can't tell the difference between sarcasm and sincerity, what makes you think he'd do better with the difference between a meaningless fact and a deeply intimate personal detail about someone?” Aliana asked.

“...Right,” Rey conceded. “Sorry.” She was quiet for a moment, not sure if she wanted to ask what she was thinking. It might not make Aliana feel better, but it wasn't as if things could get more awkward. “...So for my own peace of mind, what exactly made me different?” she asked.

“Uh... your lack of interest and the fact that I actually like you,” Aliana winced, “I... don't actually know most of those women's names.”

“Oh,” Rey said, honestly surprised by the simplicity in the answer. “Well... Thank you. I appreciate that.”

Aliana avoided looking at her. This conversation was weird enough, let alone having it after hearing that 2V had so thoroughly humiliated her by talking about her love life with her friend. There was no doubt about it: This was the single most odd day of her life. She made note to put more discretion checks on 2V's databanks, realizing how reckless it was to give Rey complete and total access to every scrap of information there was on her. Frankly she hadn't even realized that 2V had kept track of all the women she'd slept with, and was rather disturbed that the droid's archiving was that thorough.

Rey simply stood there, feeling like an imbecile for not knowing what else to say. A part of her told her not to feel guilty for making Aliana this uncomfortable considering how long she had been lying to her. Still, that wasn't a voice she wanted to listen to. She didn't want to reconcile this problem between them by making Aliana feel worse. Seeing Aliana like this didn't make her feel any better about what happened.

"... I'm sorry," she repeated. "And I'm sorry for distracting you as well... from the whole memorial... matter," she clarified.

"Oh that... no that's fine," Aliana said, grateful for the topic change at least, "You've... distracted me from a lot whenever you're on board. But that's not your fault, I need to get better self-control. I've just... this is all new to me and I don't know how to handle it."

"I see," Rey said, nodding in understanding. "Well, we're going to be together on Ahch To for awhile, so you should have plenty of time to work it out."

"I hope so," Aliana smiled, "I don't want to be a distracted, flustered mess whenever you're around."

"I'm starting to know the feeling," Rey said before putting a hand over her mouth. "...I mean... goodnight!" She said loudly before turning on her heel and heading back to her quarters.

"...What just happened?" Aliana asked, looking confused.

Normally Rey considered herself to be a level-headed woman. But whenever Aliana was around that changed.

She'd long since ruled out the idea that she had any actual feelings toward Aliana. She hadn't felt that way about her before Starkiller Base and she still couldn't bring herself to feel that way about her now. No, her problem was that Aliana was just too beautiful to maintain any kind of anger toward while in her proximity. When she wasn't around, it had been easy to remember just how much she'd betrayed her trust and how she still had a long way before trusting her again. In her quarters it was clear as day.

But when she was around the Sith all of that just melted away as she couldn't help but focus on her eyes, or the way her hair bounced around, or just how... soft she looked. Was that even a way to describe someone? Whatever, it was now!

Rey let out an exasperated sigh and plopped onto the bed in her quarters. The bed was much softer than one might have expected just by looking at it. Soft, like Aliana. Dammit! She groaned loudly into the pillow. Perhaps some Jedi teachings to control her feelings were just what she needed... in four days when they reached Ahch To... oh no...

There was no getting around it. If she wanted to keep things on an even pace between them, she had to limit the time she spent around her. She didn't feel good about it, as it felt like punishing Aliana simply for existing, but she needed to have more distance between them for her own sake and she couldn't be focusing as much as she was on how it would make Aliana feel.

She took several deep breaths in an attempt to calm herself. It was another four days. She could do this. She just needed to spend most of her time in her quarters or maybe find something around the ship to maintain. Perhaps she could focus on her saber practice and convince Aliana she didn't need

her hovering over her as she did. Just keep interactions with her to an absolute minimum. Perhaps even take her dinner in her room. That could all work out well.

She decided to wait in her quarters for a little while longer before looking for Aliana's training sabers. Maybe she had different colors other than Red? Probably not, but it kept her mind busy thinking about what color she'd like her lightsaber to be.

"Hey," Rey said curtly as she leaned into the cockpit, "I don't suppose there's a way to practice my lightsaber techniques on my own is there?"

Aliana glanced up from the Fury's control as she brought them within range of a Hutt fuel depot, "Blaster fire or dueling?"

"Blaster fire," Rey specified. "I'll likely be fighting more stormtroopers than Dark Jedi. Want to make sure I have that down to a science."

Aliana got up from the cockpit seat and beckoned Rey to follow as she led her into the cargo hold. She pulled a single-hilt training saber out of the weapon cabinet and a few round looking droids out of a crate. She handed the lightsaber and the droids to her, "These are old Jedi blaster drones. They're used to practice blaster bolt deflection. They should work. You can set the difficulty level on the switch underneath this plate here." She showed Rey where the settings on the droids were.

"Understood, thanks," Rey said before she turned and took both the saber and the droid with her to her room. She kept the conversation between them to a minimum, like she told herself that she would, and now she procured a method of training on her own. As she entered her quarters, she locked the door behind her and set to work examining the droid. She found it's power switch quickly enough. As it powered on it simply hovered at eye level in front of her. It appeared to simply be on standby mode and wasn't keen on just blasting her the second it turned on, for which she was thankful.

Looking under the plate, she fiddled with the difficulty settings until she found one that seemed ideal for starting out. With that sorted, she activated her saber, took her stance and began her training. It started off simple enough. She focused on her instincts, moving to deflect when they told her to rather than trying to intuit any firing pattern from the droid. She found that oftentimes her hand would move on it's own, as if on instinct, and she wondered just how much of a Jedi's blaster deflection was instinctual and how much was their actual focus.

It was an interesting sensation to say the least, as if the Force was guiding her. But not in a blind way, more in a way that told her she knew why she was listening to the Force and simply trusted it in this particular moment.

There were times the drone would actually hit her, causing a sharp pain wherever it struck. It was particularly fond of her left shoulder, and within an hour she had a red welt in that area. Still, she deflected more shots than she was hit with, so that was a plus.

When the exercise was over after three hours, the droid hovered in place as if watching her.

"Final tally, twelve hundred eighty six," the droid said, "Grade B. Good work, Youngling."

Youngling.

If that wasn't a blow to the pride, Rey wasn't sure what was.

She deactivated her training saber, wiped the sweat from her face and made her way to her shower. The memories of the training and the silent relief of it finally being over for the day were all that flowed through her mind as she washed herself. No other distractions clouded her thoughts.

She felt... centered.

Chapter End Notes

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Picking Up All Kinds of Cuties

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Aliana shivered as they stepped out of the Fury and onto the surface of Ahch To. She hadn't expected the planet to be this chilly. She fastened her cloak together as she followed Rey up the row of steps leading up the island. Scanners had picked up a single human on this particular island and so all that remained was to actually find the elusive Jedi who was hiding here. Aliana was walking several paces behind Rey, wanting to keep as much between herself and Skywalker as she could possibly manage.

Rey was starting to wish she told Aliana to stay on the ship. They were so close to Skywalker now that she could feel it, perhaps literally. Now that they were on the cusp of finding him, she worried that Aliana's presence could possibly jeopardize the entire mission.

...Or the sight of a Jedi could induce a trauma induced panic into Aliana. Rey began to hate herself for not coming to that conclusion first.

Regardless, the mission was delicate enough already. Hell for all they knew, Skywalker already sensed the presence of a Dark Side user when they landed so telling Aliana to stay on the ship might not have done any good. She was so new to this Force business she couldn't be sure.

As they reached the peak of the mountain, they both stopped as they noticed the hooded figure standing at the edge of the cliff and overlooking the massive ocean of Ahch To. They glanced at each other, and then slowly approached. Not wanting to surprise the old man, Aliana let out a loud whistle to get his attention.

The figure tilted his head slightly before turning around properly. Two hands, one flesh and blood, one mechanical reached up to pull back the hood. Revealed from underneath was an old man with long grey hair and a full beard. He wore pure white robes underneath the brown cloak. He appeared to be the pinnacle image of a Jedi master. That is, except his eyes.

They were a dull blue with dark rings around them showing clear age but there was more to it than that. Something in the man's eyes made him appear... off. Not like the Jedi that he should be.

"Rey," Aliana said, leaning in to whisper in Rey's ear, "I can't feel the Force coming from him at all."

She looked at Rey, only to find that she was completely still like a bantha caught in headlights. She nudged her, but Rey only made a noncommittal noise in response.

Aliana stepped back from her and stepped forward, "Are you Luke Skywalker?" Aliana asked, approaching the old Jedi.

"...Yes," Luke confirmed after a long pause. His gaze shifted slightly from the one girl standing before him, nervous but poised with determination, to the other. The expression on her face he could only describe as bitterness.

“This is Rey,” Aliana said, gesturing back to Rey, “She’s here to learn the ways of the Force from you.”

Luke’s attention turned back to Rey. He closed his eyes and sighed, as if what Aliana just said was the last thing he wanted to hear. Evidently, that very well may have been the case as he then walked down the peak from where the two women came without a word.

“Whu...?” Rey stammered, befuddled by the abrupt exit of the old Jedi, then she looked at Aliana questioningly.

“I dunno,” Aliana shrugged, “Follow him?”

Rey nodded and they turned to follow him down the mountain and through another pass they hadn’t noticed coming up. It crossed over a chasm and into what looked like a tiny village of single-person huts. It was a secluded place that Rey could almost describe as cozy were it not for the cold winds blowing through the entire cliff side. She shuddered from the chill against her exposed arms, covering them with her hands.

“Are you cold?” Aliana asked, looking at her new gear, “That outfit doesn’t have full sleeves.”

In truth, Rey was positively freezing. The desert climate she lived in for most of her life did not prepare her for climates like this. It took a great deal of self control to keep her teeth from chattering. “...I’ll be fine,” she said.

“...Alright,” Aliana nodded as she approached the hut that Luke disappeared inside, “I have more cloaks on the ship if you want to grab one later.”

She knocked on the door and leaned in toward the opening, “Master Skywalker? I know you’re in there. This girl needs a teacher and you’re the only Jedi left.”

Nothing.

Aliana banged on the hut door harder. “Master Skywalker, we can’t leave this planet until we have your help!”

It was then the door opened. Luke stepped out of the hut, having changed from his brown and white robes into heavier black clothes complete with a poncho.

“Right, thank you. Now the situation is-” Aliana began to say before Luke walked right past her without a word and further down the grassy hill.

“...Oh OK, I guess we’re doing *this* now,” Aliana sneered under her breath before turning to follow Luke. She jogged ahead and grabbed his shoulder, “Don’t walk away from me, Jedi!” she said, raising her voice.

Luke turned around and stared at her hand, then at her, raising an eyebrow.

“That’s better,” Aliana smiled, “Now, as I was saying, Rey needs a teacher. And you are the only Jedi left in the galaxy. So you need to teach Rey, or at the very least tell us why you’re ignoring us.”

Luke rolled his eyes before continuing down the trail. “I’m ignoring you because I’m not interested,” he said finally, his voice rough and gravelly, “Go away.”

Aliana stepped in his way this time. "It's not a matter of interest," she said through gritted teeth. "It's a matter of life and death. The First Order is on the rise and won't be stopped until we give it proper opposition!"

"You don't need the Jedi," Luke said dismissively, "The Jedi are better off dead, and you two are better off not messing around with the Force. Without the Jedi the galaxy is better off."

Aliana and Rey looked at each other, confused. Finally, it was Rey who spoke up.

"Master Skywalker, the First Order tried to destroy the Republic. They almost slaughtered billions of people, and they're only getting more aggressive," she explained, stepping forward, "We need your help. We need the Jedi Order back... we need Luke Skywalker."

Luke turned a sombre look Rey, his eyes seeming to pierce through her in a way that made her feel vaguely uncomfortable. Then with a heavy sigh, Luke said "You don't need Luke Skywalker."

Rey's brow furrowed as she looked at the aging Jedi Master, "Did... you hear a word I just said?"

Luke seemed to delight in their confusion as a small smirk crossed his face, "What did you think was going to happen here? Did you think I came to the most un-findable place in the galaxy for no reason at all?" He turned away from the both of them and continued back down the mountain, "Go away."

Rey moved to follow after him but Aliana stopped her.

"Hold on, I have one more trick up my sleeve," she said, turning to face Luke as he walked away and loudly yelling, "If the Jedi won't train her, I guess the Sith will have to do."

Luke stopped dead in his tracks, turning back to look at the two women. "... What are you talking about?"

Aliana said nothing. She only smiled and drew her lightsaber from her belt, revealing the blade to be crimson red. She relished how Luke's eyes went wide in shock.

"You may call me Darth Amorosa," she said with a faux-malevolent tone in her voice. "And I present you with an ultimatum, Master Skywalker. Either take this girl as your apprentice... or I will."

Rey said nothing to this, only taking in the sight of Aliana behaving like a Sith Lord up close. It filled her with very unexpected, however complicated feelings.

Luke's expression went from one of abject horror to almost disbelief. "That's impossible," he said stepping back up the hill to the two women. "The Sith are extinct."

"Your predecessors thought that too, but then the Clone Wars happened," Aliana said as she glared the Jedi down, relishing in one of the few times she got to pull the 'big bad Dark Lady' routine, "I'd have thought you would have learned by now."

Luke narrowed his eyes at Aliana. "If that were true, why would you give this girl to me as an apprentice rather than just take her as your own? What's your game... Sith?" he asked as he approached her.

Aliana narrowed her eyes at Luke as he approached. "Trust me, if Rey here asked me to train her, I absolutely would. You, however, were her first choice. So you can either come back to the Resistance with us, train her in the Force, or just stay here and let me do it. Either way, she will learn the Force. If you and the Jedi won't help the Resistance stop the First Order, then the Sith will do just as well."

"Master Skywalker, please," Rey said, desperation in her voice. "The galaxy needs your help, one way or another."

Luke gave Aliana a puzzled look as she deactivated her lightsaber, "It seems I don't have much of a choice, do I? Fine... come back here at dawn. I'll teach you the ways of the Force, and maybe then you'll learn why the galaxy is better off without the Jedi."

Aliana smiled at Rey, "And you didn't want to bring the Sith."

Rey couldn't help the smile spreading on her face. "OK, you were right to come, Miss Smug," she said fondly. "Now let's get back on the ship. I'm actually freezing my ass off out here."

Luke watched the two of them curiously. They certainly didn't behave the way he would have expected a fledgling Jedi and a Sith Lord would. He simply shook his head and resumed down the path to perform whatever daily routine he set out to do. Aliana and Rey returned down the other way back toward the Fury. As much as meeting Luke had been a surprise, it was nice to have actually made some progress in such a short time. Still, she wondered why Luke seemed so disinterested with the Jedi and bringing them back. As they walked to the Fury, she quietly wondered whether what Aliana had said when they were travelling to Takodana was right. That Luke had come to an elusive planet that couldn't be found by anyone to hide from the galaxy.

She glanced back up at the village they'd left behind, and frowned. Something was wrong. Very wrong.

Rey was fiddling with her training saber by the ocean's side. Aliana had told her that the crystal chamber could be opened to change the color, and she sat there with a gold crystal in her lap as she tried in vain to actually open the lightsaber. It proved to be a struggle, as there were no latches or grooves to fit her nail into in order to pry it open.

She sighed as she set the hilt down onto the dirt and looked up toward the Fury.

And that's when her heart stopped cold in her chest. Directly in front of her, clear as day, was Kyo Ren.

He was looking down at something, seemingly not noticing her at first. When she tried taking a step back, she knocked over a nearby rock, the noise causing him to look up.

She could see where she injured him in their previous encounter. The skin split by Aliana's lightsaber had not been stitched together but rather seemed to be bridged by a sheet of metal that went under the skin. Another addition to his generally unpleasant visage. As he saw Rey, he looked just as surprised to see her. Seeing the slimy bastard even look at her was enough to make her skin crawl. He took a single step forward and Rey immediately reached for the pistol holstered to her belt firing it at him thrice over.

By the time the blaster bolts would have reached him, he was gone. There was no sign of him anywhere. What she did see was Aliana holding her lightsaber in a manner that suggested she had just deflected those bolts.

“Rey, what the hell!?” she asked loudly.

“I’m sorry, I-”

“What are you shooting at me for?!” Aliana demanded, looking quite upset and breathing heavily.

“I... I don’t know what came over me,” Rey lied, trying not to think too hard about what had just happened, “I just... thought I saw something and panicked.”

Aliana seemed to settle down a little bit as she deactivated her lightsaber, but she looked at Rey suspiciously, “What did you see?”

Rey turned her gaze away from Aliana. She wasn’t willing to accept the idea that she was hallucinating about Kylo Ren. She did not want to think about that being a possibility and what that would say about her. Was her mind so badly damaged by what he attempted to do to her in that interrogation cell? Was her seeing visions of him some kind of sign of weakness? She wasn’t sure, and she didn’t want to accept any possibility as truth. She knew if she looked into Aliana’s unyielding gaze, she would get the truth out of her. She wasn’t ready to deal with that.

“I... I don’t know what I saw,” she said. “All I know is that it wasn’t good.”

Aliana’s suspicious look became one of concern as she stepped closer, holding a black cloak out to her, “I’m here if you want to talk about it, you know.”

Rey accepted the cloak, the fabric actually offering her some comfort. Rey looked back up at Aliana, surprised to see Aliana offering the chance to talk to her about this, but not forcing it on her. “Thank you,” she said softly. “... But I think I can handle this. And I won’t shoot at you anymore if that’s what you’re worried about,” she smiled at Aliana in an attempt to lighten the mood.

Aliana smiled and nodded, “Alright, if you’re sure. Night’s falling soon, I’ll get dinner ready and you can come in whenever you want.”

Rey smiled, looking forward to dinner as she always did on the Fury and turned back to the ocean, slipping the cloak over her shoulders. As she fastened it, she noticed the faint smell of rose water and cinnamon hit her nose. She was confused, before she realized that Aliana hadn’t given her a spare cloak lying in the cargo hold. This was Aliana’s cloak. It had her scent on it. A scent that Rey hadn’t truly noticed before. It was pleasant. And... comforting. She honestly could not get over how pleasant the cloak smelled. She found herself being disappointed that the scent was as faint as it was. Perhaps if she held it closer to her face she could bask in the pleasant aroma more. It helped a little, but not by much. If only she were this close to Aliana instead of just her cloak.

She shook her head of these thoughts, ripping the cloak off of herself. No. She couldn’t keep doing this. This attraction could not get in the way of her training nor would it distract her from the very real problems they still had. She wouldn’t allow it. Balling up the cloak as best she could in one hand, she moved to throw it into the ocean.

But she stopped. No. This was Alie’s cloak. She gave it to her to keep her warm, not to try and distract her from her training. She wouldn’t even be training with Luke if not for her intervention.

There were moments where Rey could almost convince herself that this was all some manipulative scheme of Aliana's. To make Rey feel sorry for the tragedies in her life, to play on their undeniable attraction to one another and tempt her away from the Jedi path. But none of those thoughts matched up with what Aliana had actually done. She gave Rey the choice of which path to walk and when Rey chose the path of the Jedi, Aliana went out of her way to make this possible. This wasn't part of some malevolent scheme. Aliana wasn't deceiving her. She actually cared about her.

And knowing that made it harder for Rey to ignore these feelings she was having. Aliana wasn't just selfless and kind, she was positively *beautiful*. Even just holding her cloak and feeling the soft fabric under her fingers was comforting. Rey put the cloak back over herself, wrapping herself tightly within. The tighter she held it to herself, and the more that pleasant aroma overtook her, the more it felt like she was being hugged. She sat down on the rock and buried her face into the collar, letting herself drift into a daydream about what it would be like to snuggle up to Aliana and hold her.

For a moment, things were almost perfect.



“Amorosa?” Luke asked as he approached Aliana, who was piling up firewood around the base of the Fury. She had taken to gathering wood for more outdoor gatherings, as she'd thought about plans to have meals around a fire to ease the tension that was rapidly building up in the ship. However, she fumbled and dropped her vibroblade when Luke approached her.

“W-what do you want?” Aliana asked, feeling very nervous as she found herself alone with Luke Skywalker.

“I wanted to talk to you,” Luke said, approaching carefully, “You’re... curious.”

Aliana’s expression tilted slightly into confusion but still very much on edge. “About you? No, not really,” she said, shaking her head.

Luke resisted the urge to roll his eyes. “I meant that you’re unusual,” he clarified.

Aliana stared at him for a moment, then jerked her head to beckon him toward the separate pile she’d made a short way off from the Fury’s ramp. She held a hand out to it and ignited it with a bolt of Force Lightning, sitting down on a rock, “Alright, what did you want to talk about?”

He remained standing as Aliana sat down. “Who are you?” he asked plainly. “Because I’ve met more than a few Sith Lords in my time. Even more that were twisted by the Dark Side. You, Amorosa, are something else entirely. What’s your story? What in the galaxy makes a Sith like you?”

“My story? Alright,” Aliana said, sitting forward and propping her arms on her legs, “Born to a Sith Lord mother, raised by her, trained by her. Became an oddity in the Force. Mother was killed by a Jedi Master. Drifted for years doing mercenary work and self-teaching with Sith Holocrons. Met a scavenger. Became her friend. Fell in love with her. Stopped a thousand mile-wide death beam from destroying the Republic, it was cool you should have seen it. Now I’m here, guarding my scavenger friend while she tries to become a Jedi. That’s my story, Master Skywalker.”

Luke blinked, surprised by how dense and concise that story was. Whether that story was genuine or not still eluded him. “Alright... let’s say for the sake of argument, that I believe all of that,” he began. “Why is it that ‘Try to rise to power’ never occurs at any point in this story? What kind of Sith would oppose the kind of conquest that the First Order sets out to commit rather than join it? Why help the woman you love join the order of your enemy? How do you identify as Sith when every action you commit runs counter intuitive to that philosophy.”

“Well let’s take that one at a time, Master Skywalker,” Aliana said, “What power is there to rise to? With you here being a washed out hermit, Rey being untrained, your sister having no use for the Force, and Kylo Ren being the pathetic loser that he is, I am the most powerful Force user in the Galaxy. Not as impressive a title as it would have been fifty years ago, but what can I do? But why rise to power when I’ve already risen as high as I can go?”

She looked down at the fire and threw a few branches onto it, her crimson eyes shimmering in the firelight.

“Why didn’t I join the First Order? Well that one’s a lot more simple,” Aliana shrugged, “I’m gay, and the First Order kills anyone they find who is. Also it being led by a Jedi who can’t fight with a lightsaber to save his life doesn’t help matters.”

She glanced back up at Luke, watching as he seemed to be trying his hardest to maintain a pazaak face.

“I’m helping Rey become a Jedi because it’s what she wanted,” Aliana continued, “If she wanted to be Sith I would train her that way. But she chose to be a Jedi. The decision isn’t up to me. And it’s because I love her that I’m helping her get there. And how can I call myself Sith? Because nothing

I do runs contrary to the Sith Code, and much of what I do is very unbecoming of a Jedi. I know it might seem like I'm calm and reasonable now, but if you were in battle with me you'd see how much of a ruthless schutta I can become."

Luke kept his gaze fixed on her for a long silent moment. The only sound was the crackling of the fire and the shoreline winds. "... Alright then," Luke nodded. "I suppose my last question is what you hope to gain from this? When Rey becomes a Jedi and single-handedly defeats the First Order, because that's all it takes apparently, what then? A Sith cannot possibly be satisfied in a galaxy of stagnation that you just described. So what do you intend to do when this entire fiasco is over?"

"I dunno, settle down? Get married, have kids and an akk dog? Isn't that the dream?" Aliana smirked. Said smirk quickly fell from her face as she looked down into the fire, "I don't know what I'm going to do. But there'll always be another war to fight. Some other rogue Jedi with delusions of grandeur. Another Revan. Another Vader. Another Kylo Ren. It never stops. I'm not so naive to think that this will be the war to end all wars."

Luke took a moment to consider his next words. "... Revan, huh? You really have done your research," he said, his tone almost impressed.

"That's what pride in where you came from does," Aliana said, throwing another branch onto the fire, "I am Sith. My whole family was Sith. I don't want to be anything else. I couldn't even if I did want to."

"A whole family of Sith?" Luke asked. "How far back does that go?"

"Three thousand years, to the days of the Resurgent Sith Empire," Aliana explained, "There isn't much of a legacy. For the most part it's just individual Sith doing what they can to get by in the galaxy. We're not particularly strong in the Force. Not like Anakin Skywalker was, or Rey is now."

Luke arched a brow at Aliana. "You just claimed to have stopped a thousand mile-wide death beam from destroying the Republic and you don't consider yourself particularly strong?" he asked. "I haven't even known Darth Sidious to demonstrate that kind of power."

Aliana was quiet for a moment, then sat up straight, "I'm not like most Force users. Most of them... you, Kylo Ren, Rey, they're equally attuned to the Light and the Dark Side. I'm not. I'm attuned to the Dark Side only. So when I use the Light, it's extremely weak and takes a great deal of energy out of me. But when I use the Dark Side, it's a lot more powerful than a typical Sith would demonstrate."

She eyed Luke carefully, trying to read him. When her attempts to probe his feelings came back with nothing, she conceded that he was simply more skilled than she was.

"The Dark Side draws its power from many different things. Anger, Hate, Fear. But none of them are more powerful than Passion. Passion is the Dark Side in its purest form," Aliana explained, "Channeling that can perform amazing feats if controlled. The greater your passions, the greater the power you can draw upon. And doing that on Starkiller Base still almost killed me regardless."

Luke began putting the pieces together in his mind before sighing. "A Sith Lord saving the Republic from a planet killer with the power of love," he said. "Alright, I believe you. No one could be so insane as to make that up." With that he sat down on the ground across from Aliana.

“If I wasn’t there, I wouldn’t have believed it,” Aliana smirked, “I needed to sleep for 18 hours to recover from that. Don’t ask me to do it again anytime soon.”

“Trust me, I won’t,” Luke said, waving the notion off. “Alright, so you’re on this planet and will remain here until Rey is complete with her training. I can live with that. So long as you do nothing to interfere with her training or disrupt the lives of the locals, then you’ll be fine.”

“All I’m teaching her is lightsaber combat,” Aliana shrugged, “Anything else I teach her is at her own request. But I will always stress to her the importance of not being afraid of the Dark Side.”

Luke grumbled at Aliana’s conviction. “Well... I suppose that will only help training along,” he admitted. His attention was then directed by a soft squeak that he heard behind the rock Aliana was sitting on. “Speaking of locals, it looks like you have a guest.”

Aliana glanced behind her, looking surprised at the tiny creature that was hiding behind her, “Well hey there,” she said softly, picking up the tiny creature and holding it in her hands, “What are you doing sneaking about, sweetie?” she cooed as she stroked its head.

“Must have been drawn by the warmth of the fire,” Luke proposed. “If it’s out and about at this time of night, it must not have a nest to come back to.”

“Poor little guy,” Aliana cooed, completely forgetting about Luke as she watched the... bird? It looked like a bird at least. As she watched the bird curl up in the crook of her arm and chirp softly, “What is it?”

“It’s called a Porg,” Luke answers plainly, genuinely surprised how taken with the critter Aliana appeared to be.

“Do you not have a nest to keep warm in?” Aliana said softly as she stroked the Porg’s head, “Do you wanna come on my ship? I’m picking up all kinds of cuties, might as well add you to it.”

Luke made a grunting noise as he stood up from the ground, dusting off his robes. “They eat fish mostly,” he said turning away. “But any meat will do in a pinch.” With he began walking away from the fire and back towards the small village without so much as a goodbye.

Aliana paid Luke the same courtesy and didn’t acknowledge him leaving. Quite frankly she was relieved he was. She focused her attention on the Porg snuggling into her arm as she continued cooing softly to it and sitting with her back against the rock so he could soak in the warmth of the fire, “You are just a snuggly little thing aren’t you? I’ve gotta stop talking like this before I go back inside, yes I do.”

After a moment longer, Rey walked up to the fire, being bathed in its warmth. “Oh, thank the Force, you made a fire. I...” she paused noticing the small creature in Aliana’s arms. The sight was admittedly adorable, bringing a smile to Rey’s face. “Oh, I see you made a new friend,” she noted.

“Mmhmm,” Aliana nodded as she looked up at her and smiled, “He just crawled up to me while I was talking philosophy with the Jedi. Honestly the Porg is a much nicer experience.”

“Oh yeah, I meant to ask you,” she said looking back to where she saw Luke walking. “I noticed Master Skywalker walking down when I arrived. Is everything ok?”

“Yeah, just wanted to grill me on why a Sith was here decidedly not eating puppies for breakfast,” Aliana rolled her eyes, “Same stuff with Leia, different miserable old Jedi.”

“Ah I see,” Rey said, notably relieved that things didn’t go too disastrously. With that taken care of she took a seat by the fire across from Aliana. She was unable to take her eyes off of how adorable Aliana was being with the Porg. “Think there’s a place for him on the ship?” Rey asked, half kidding.

“I’m sure I can find one,” Aliana smiled, taking a piece of dried veg-meat and holding it over the Porg’s mouth to see if he would take it, “He’s small, he’ll fit right at home. I just told him I was picking up all sorts of cuties in my travels.”

Rey felt a deep blush spread over her face, which she used the dark cloak that Aliana gave her to conceal it. “Oh for God’s sake. You’re insufferable,” she grumbled against the soft fabric.

Aliana looked up at her and smiled brightly, “Hey, unlike one of us, I wasn’t sniffing your clothes earlier.”

Rey lifted her head and pointed a finger at Aliana. “I did NOT sniff your robe!” she said indignantly. “You can’t prove anything!”

The Porg made a noise that Rey could only assume was to her detriment considering how close he was nuzzled into Aliana’s hold. “Oh don’t take her side!” she said sternly.

“Rey, I saw you from the cockpit window,” Aliana snickered, “You buried your face in my cloak and breathed deeply.”

“It is cold out here! I was just warming up my face! I was not sniffing anything!” Rey insisted despite the growing blush on her face.

“Rey, I’m honest with you as much as I can be, can you be honest with me about something?” Aliana asked.

Rey huffed, “Only if it’s not about sniffing your cloak.”

“...Do you think I’m hot?” Aliana asked.

Rey bit her lip as she thought about answering the question honestly. With how cold she had been for the past few hours and how flustered she was at the moment, she concluded that no lie she told would have been believable.

“...Yes,” she admitted. “I do find you attractive.”

Aliana’s smile twitched a little wider and her cheeks flushed, “Well, that explains why you’ve been acting so weird,” she said, “I hope you know that I don’t... expect anything of you. I’m not doing all of this for you in the hopes that you’ll start to feel the same way about me that I do about you.”

Rey went to speak but the words died in her throat. She honestly didn’t know that was the case. “I... I appreciate that,” she said, a fond smile starting to form on her face. “I appreciate a lot of what you’ve done for me, Aliana. ...You’re a good friend.”

She spoke truthfully, but still couldn’t bring herself to look Aliana in the face as she spoke. It felt as though her feelings, as confusing as they were, threatened to burst out of her chest if she did.

Aliana, for her part, had successfully managed to hide the joy she felt when she heard that Rey still considered her a friend, and reached over to lay a hand on her shoulder, “Well, with Finn out of commission, you deserve a good friend in this cold, miserable place.”

“I just hope you don’t get the wrong idea about-”

“Not at all,” Aliana shook her head, “Lots of women find me attractive. It’s not the earth-shattering revelation you might think it is. Don’t worry, I know where we stand.”

Rey breathed a heavy sigh of relief. “Thank you,” she said gratefully. “I’m starting to feel a little foolish for not coming forth about this sooner.”

The Porg squeaked inquisitively.

“You don’t need to worry about that,” Rey said to the critter.

“It’s alright,” Aliana smiled, “I probably wouldn’t have come forward about how I felt either if you hadn’t held me at the metaphorical gunpoint.”

Rey felt her flushed face grow ever red, this time in embarrassment. Her mind went back to the day she held Aliana, Finn, Chewie and herself hostage only for the truth she was demanding from her to be that she was in love with her. “That wasn’t my smartest decision I’ll admit.”

Aliana shrugged. In truth, having to confess under duress like that had been painful, but under the circumstances she’d tried not to hold it against her. However, the sting she felt whenever she was reminded that Rey knew and how she knew continued to nag at her. Maybe they’d talk about it some time, but not for a while. There would be time for her baggage later.

“Not much we can do about it now,” she said simply as she threw another branch onto the fire.

“We can try and do better,” Rey offered, a meek smile on her face. “I can try and do better.”

Aliana was quiet for a moment, her face staring into the fire. For a moment, Rey thought she might have seen her eyes glistening.

“I... appreciate that,” Aliana smiled.

Rey sat by the fire, wrapped up in Aliana’s cloak and feeling generally good about herself. She’d cleared the air that desperately needed clearing and felt like a huge weight had been lifted off her shoulders. Aliana had gone inside to find somewhere for the Porg to sleep, and so she was alone, by a comforting fire and wrapped up in a warm cloak that smelled of her best friend, a fact she was considerably less embarrassed about admitting now.

She sighed and sunk down into the soil, leaning her back against the rock and basking in the warmth of the fire. Nothing could possibly ruin this moment.

“Why do I keep seeing you?”

Kriff.

Rey’s look of serene calmness turned into one of vitriol contempt as she glared at Kylo Ren who now sat across from her.

“Go to hell,” she told the apparition. “You’re not real.”

Kylo looked around the campsite he found himself in. “Can you see my surroundings? I can’t see yours.”

“I don’t care what you can see,” Rey snapped. “Sooner or later I’m going to find a way to get you out of my head.”

Kylo tilted his head in curiosity. “Does your master not know about this?”

“She is not my master!” she bellowed at him, standing up to talk down at him.

“Why haven’t you told her?” he asked curiously, rising from his seat to meet her gaze. “You’re keeping this from her for a reason. What could that be?”

“Don’t pretend to know me, you pathetic wretch,” Rey growled.

“I know you better than you think,” Kylo countered. “I may know you better than you know yourself.”

“You don’t know anything,” Rey seethed, “You’re just a murderous grease stain!”

“Is that what the Sith told you? Or Skywalker?” Kylo asked.

“It’s what I saw with my own two eyes!”

“Can you even trust that?” Kylo asked. “You don’t know if I’m really here or not. You could just be going insane.”

“Don’t you play games with me!” Rey said with a low sneer. “You are a spoiled helpless worm of a person. I broke you before, I’ll do it again.”

“Then get rid of me right now,” Kylo taunted. “Prove your superiority.”

Rey had been trying to do that. But because she had no idea how or why she was seeing him in the first place, she didn’t even know where to start. She knew it was because she was still mostly untrained and there were things about the Force she couldn’t yet comprehend, but being in this position again. Unable to resist as this parasite invaded her mind whenever he wished...

She hung her head and growled in frustration.

“Now that’s more like the girl I saw, helpless and whimpering as I combed through her mind like it was an open book,” Kylo taunted her, “What hope could you possibly have if you can’t even keep your own mind closed?”

“If I’m so easy to read, why didn’t that save you on Ilum?” She grumbled. “Maybe this is my punishment for not killing you when I had the chance.”

“Or maybe this is a sign that your only hope to master the Force is through me,” Kylo said, stepping closer to her.

“Don’t come near me!” Rey shouted.

“The Sith doesn’t really care about you, she only wants you for her twisted fantasies,” Kylo said, ignoring her demand.

“I said get back!” Rey her hand up to swat the Dark Jedi away. While her hand made no contact, the fire before her suddenly roared with new life, shooting meters high into the air. The suddenness of the act caused Rey to shoot back and fall against the rock.

The main hatch of the Fury opened and Aliana came running down the ramp, “Rey? Are you alright?”

“She’ll use you,” Kylo hissed directly in her ear, “It’s in her nature.”

“Shut up,” Rey said, convulsing in disgust at Kylo’s proximity. “You’re not real.”

Aliana came around the rock and knelt down in front of her, “Rey, what’s the mat-” she stopped when she touched Rey’s hand. She could feel something. A presence in the Force. Closing her eyes, she focused and covered both of them in the same veil of Dark Side energy that she’d used to sneak onto Starkiller Base. She felt the presence vanish now that it could no longer connect with either of them.

Rey looked to her side to see Kylo Ren blink out of existence as she felt the eerie chill of the Dark Side swarm around her. She looked down at Aliana, who had opened her eyes and was looking at her with concern, still holding her hand.

“Better?” she asked softly.

“... Y-Yes,” Rey said, not realizing she was holding her breath. “Thank you. I... I don’t know what that was.”

“Same thing as earlier today?” Aliana prompted.

“It... must be,” Rey said. Something inside of her still didn’t want to admit to Aliana that she kept seeing Kylo Ren. She didn’t want her worrying more about her than she already was. She wanted to prove that she could deal with this, if to no one else but herself.

“You still don’t want to talk about it?” Aliana asked. When Rey shook her head, she frowned slightly, but didn’t press the issue. Instead she took a scrap of cloth and wiped Rey’s eyes. It was only then that Rey realized that she’d started crying.

“I...” she could hardly put a coherent thought together before she noticed her own tears streaming down her face. “I’m sorry. I don’t know what’s wrong with me,” she said in a choked, broken voice. It wasn’t necessarily a lie. She knew Kylo Ren was in her head. She just didn’t know how or why or what to do.

“Well I won’t make you talk about it,” Aliana said, taking a rare initiative and pulling Rey closer as she wrapped her arms around her protectively. She wanted to say something else to her, to comfort her and maybe make her open up, but instead she just held her. She hoped that this would be enough to make her feel more at ease.

Rey clung to Aliana as tightly as she could, as if the wind would sweep her away if she didn’t. She lost the will to hold back the choked sob in her throat. Everything she felt in that cell on Starkiller

base just came rushing back to her in the worst possible way and she couldn't handle it. She could barely speak or think. She just cried.

Aliana felt something in her chest break as she stroked Rey's hair and cradled her as she completely broke down in her arms. She wanted so desperately to help the poor girl, but that Rey wouldn't tell her anything left her with little to do other than offer whatever comfort she could think of. Whatever it was, she knew it had to be connected with what happened on Starkiller Base, whatever that had been. She knew that the grease-stain of a Jedi was involved somehow.

"What did you do to this girl?" she whispered audibly, not realizing that she had done so right next to Rey's ear, "She's done nothing wrong..."

Rey pulled away to look at Aliana, confusion etched onto her tear streaked face. "W-What?" she asked through a cracked voice.

"Oh... I didn't realize you could hear... I was just wondering what that grease stain did to you to put you into this kind of state," Aliana said, still holding Rey, "I just... I don't know why anyone would want to hurt you this badly..."

Rey felt her breath catch in her throat. Aliana knew. Of course she knew. She wasn't an idiot. A part of her was panicking, not wanting to admit she was right. Another, much louder part of herself, however, was taken aback by just how kind and warm Aliana's words to her were. "I... I don't know what is going on, why he's doing this or if it's even him," Rey admitted meekly in between sniffles. "But.. but I'll take care of it. I think... I think once I start my training, I can make him go away..."

"Go away? Is he-" Aliana stopped herself and sighed. She couldn't push Rey to tell her. If she was going to be adamant about it, she had to wait for her to come for help if she needed it. "...Do you want me to let go?"

"...No," Rey said rather pitifully, clinging to Aliana even harder than before. The fire had begun to die and fade into embers in light of it's explosive outburst. Aliana was the softest and warmest thing Rey could find at the moment.

Aliana wanted to smile, and feel flattered that Rey was clinging to her. But the way she seemed to so desperately bury her face into her shoulder couldn't bring her any kind of positive feeling. It just made her more worried. So she simply held her silently and tucked her head under her chin. If this was what her friend needed from her, then she'd be more than happy to provide it.

Aliana rubbed her eyes as she sat down on the couch. She'd had to carry Rey back inside and bring her to her quarters. Whatever she'd seen, it had freaked her out pretty badly. She only hoped she would open up about it sooner rather than later.

As she went over a datapad containing communications from the Resistance, she quietly wondered about the presence she'd felt. She hadn't so much as heard a whisper until she touched Rey's hand, and then it was like a bright explosion in the Force. Her mind wandered to the many historical records she'd perused over the years, and one hypothesis came to her.

"Hey 2V?" she asked.

“Yes, Alie?” 2V replied, stepping out from the cargo hold. “Is Miss Rey alright? Does she need another blanket?”

“She’s asleep, but she’s not alright,” Aliana shook her head, “Could you do me a favor? Compile all the information in the Fury’s databanks relating to Force Bonds and put it onto a datapad for me? I’ve got a new mystery to solve.”

“At once, Alie!” 2V said dutifully before making his way to the records room. “Sorting through data is one of my favorite pastimes.”

“Thanks 2V. Love you,” Aliana said as she continued looking through the Resistance’s report. It was the only lead she had to go on, but it might just prove to be fruitful. And if her suspicions were correct, and the Force had decided to form a bond between Rey and Kylo Ren, there left only one question.

How could she sever it?

Chapter End Notes

If you enjoyed this chapter, leave a comment explaining why. Free content thrives on interaction and feedback.

Out of Our Collective Misery

Chapter Notes

2/26/2023 - Chapter has been edited to be more in line with later characterization, and lay the seeds for a minor conflict regarding Rey's treatment of Aliana that was the result of feedback that occurred after publishing.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Rey woke up that morning feeling a lot more at ease than she had any other morning in her life. She felt warm, comfortable, and at peace with herself. She had never known it was possible to sleep this well. On Jakku she would wake up multiple times in the night, trained to stir at the slightest noise in case someone found her hideout and tried to attack. Here on the Fury the only sound was the hum of the Reactor.

She stretched out with a smile and paused when she realized two things. One, she was still fully clothed from last night. Two, she was wrapped tightly in Aliana's cloak. She took stock of her surroundings and she was laying atop her sheets with Aliana's cloak wrapped around her in a makeshift sleeping bag. Her brow furrowed in confusion until she remembered everything that had happened last night. The hallucination, Aliana's intervention, falling asleep in her arms. She must have carried her back to bed and wrapped the cloak around her rather than fumble with her bedsheets. In truth, Rey actually preferred that choice. The cloak was impossibly soft for how durable it was against the cold winds on Ahch To. Soft and comforting...

Rey sat up on the bed, stretching her arms and legs out as she mentally prepared herself for the day ahead. Luke had agreed to train her today and she wanted to be punctual for her first lesson. As nerve wracking as the notion of training under Luke Skywalker was, another part of her was very excited. What secrets of the Jedi would she learn on this planet? What words of wisdom would Luke impart onto her? And of course, what force techniques could she learn to make her hallucinations stop?

As she stood up, she tightened the cloak around her shoulders and yawned, emerging from her quarters and out onto the deck of the Fury.

Aliana was sat on the couch perusing over a stack of datapads. She looked like she'd been up all night, with her eyes half-closed and dark circles running underneath. The Sith glanced up at Rey and smiled as she entered. "Morning sleepyhead, I was just about to come wake you," she said, putting the datapad down and giving Rey her full attention, "There's some cinnamon polystarch in your pack, we're cutting too close to dawn to eat on the ship."

"Oh, thanks." Rey said with an easy smile, picking the pack up from the couch. "I'll be sure to eat this on my way to training. Want to make sure I'm on time, you know?" Her eyes turned back to the pile of Datapads right beside Aliana. "What were you up to all night?"

"Uh... research, on the Force," Aliana said, rubbing her eyes, "The Fury has a collection of Jedi and Sith archives, I've been going through it. I think I just lost track of the time. I get absorbed in

my reading easily.”

“You always were an academic, weren't you?” Rey said fondly. She was already turning to head into her quarters to grab the rest of her things before she stopped to consider that perhaps Aliana was lying. The idea of that disturbed her greatly, given how the Sith promised to be honest with her, but what truly surprised her that such a possibility took this long to cross her mind? Was she getting soft around Aliana again? Letting her guard down too quickly? She frowned, hoping that would not be the case. She didn't want to set herself up for another harrowing betrayal. A part of her suggested that this was good. That not second guessing everything Alie did was a good first step to making things OK between them again. Her mind went back to last night. The way Aliana so effortlessly made the hallucination go away, the way she held her as she wept. A learned schemer couldn't fake such genuine affection like that, could they? She took a deep breath, pushing the questions away for now, and went back into her quarters. “Well, you'll have plenty of time to catch up on sleep while I'm away!” Rey called out.

“Oh no, I can't sleep now, I'm so close to a breakthrough,” Aliana laughed as she picked up the datapad again, “I'll get a nap eventually. Or just meditate. That usually does the trick... you okay going up there alone?”

Rey stepped out of the door to her quarters, pack and staff strapped to her back. “I should be fine,” she said reassuringly. “You've already done enough for me since we arrived. Without you, I wouldn't have a master at all. I can take it from here.”

“Alright, good luck... Jedi,” Aliana said playfully as she turned her attention back to her datapad.

Rey smiled and stepped down from the Fury's ramp and made her way up the steps of the island toward the village. As she climbed, she couldn't help but wonder what Aliana was actually studying. Even if she had told the truth, she could be studying any number of things about the Force. If the Fury's library was as extensive as she'd implied. The thought hit her that she could do some studying of her own. But she didn't know exactly where to look. 2V might know, but she'd have to be careful not to make the droid spill too much like last time. As long as she prepared her questions proper-

Her thoughts were cut off when she walked face-first into Luke Skywalker and stepped back, blinking up at him. He was dusting himself off and looked clearly unamused.

Rey stood there for a moment before lifting her arms from her sides. “I'm here,” she said with an awkward smile. “...I'm not late, am I?”

Luke chose not to say anything and turned to walk towards what appeared to be an ancient, primitive temple. Rey followed him inside without another word. They entered a large rotund room made entirely of the same stone the outside was composed of. There was not much in the way of decoration besides a small body of water that filled a shallow circular carving at the temple centre. The sun shined through another doorway, causing the water inside to glisten, Rey followed the sunlight source to see a short walkway that seemed to be carved out of the cliff face. Atop this walkway rested a large flattened stone.

“Lesson one,” Luke said finally, “Understanding the Force.”

Rey followed him up onto the cliff face, and Luke motioned for her to sit on the stone, “Sit here, legs crossed.”

Rey obeyed and sat down on the stone, looking out toward the ocean.

“Now... why do you want the Jedi Order to return?” Luke asked.

Rey’s brow furrowed. That was an excellent question, if she were being honest. Why did she want the Jedi to return? Most of what she knew of the Jedi for the longest time were from stories she grew up with. Her personal experience with Force Sensitives seemed to differ wildly from that. Hell, the idea of Aliana offering to train her as a Sith was something she didn’t even find objectionable. So what made her want to reconstitute the Jedi.

“...It just seems like the right thing to do,” she said, trying not to sound uncertain in the presence of her new master. “The Jedi guided and protected the people of the Republic for generations, and if we ever needed guidance and protection, it would be now.”

“And what do you know of the Force?” Luke asked.

“It’s...” Rey paused, trying to understand what she was about to say, “A power that Jedi and Sith have that lets them do extraordinary things.”

Luke stared her down before simply saying, “No. It’s not.” He motioned for her to take a meditative stance. Rey obliged and he knelt down in front of her, “Close your eyes, and reach out.”

Rey had to resist the initial urge to physically reach out with her hand. She spent enough time with Aliana to know that is definitely not what Luke meant. She closed her eyes, took a deep breath and reached out with her senses. Initially she focused on what she could physically sense. The ocean thrashing against the sea, the warmth of the sun on her face coupled with the cool breeze from the waves, the strong scent of salt. For a moment she worried if she was doing it right. It was then that she felt it. Something faint in the back of her mind until she focused on it. Like a whole other sense she had long neglected aside from scant moments had suddenly woken up.

“What do you see?” Luke asked, his voice little more than a whisper.

“...The Island,” Rey replied. And she did. She saw the island, all the life on the island. All that had ever died on that island which allowed new life to grow. She felt the warmth of the sun and the coldness of the ocean in a much grander way than she had before. She felt the light shining onto the planet and the darkness that the planet hid. She felt the cohabitation of all the creatures who lived here and the conflict that arose from the cruelties of nature.

“And between it all-?” Luke prompted. Rey wasn’t sure if Luke was hearing her thoughts or if she said all of this aloud without realizing.

“...Balance,” she realized. “An energy... A Force.”

“And inside you?” Luke asked, leaning forward.

“...That same Force.”

“And this is the lesson,” Luke explained, “That Force does not belong to the Jedi. To say that if the Jedi die the Light dies is vanity, can you feel that?”

She could. The Force felt so large that it eclipsed her. Made her feel small and insignificant. It was a humbling experience, as if she was only now realizing how little she or anyone else mattered to

the rest of the Galaxy. The war, the Resistance, they all felt so small in comparison. Like ants running across the dirt, on their own business to which the large humans never paused to give a single thought toward.

Then she felt something else beneath the island. A dark, cold, sad place that made her feel a chill run through her heart. A place that seemed to scream and writhe as it called to her.

“Balance,” Luke nodded, “Powerful light, powerful darkness.”

Darkness? Was this the Dark Side? It couldn't be. She'd felt the Dark Side. It soothed her, energized her. It made her feel strong and secure. It had protected her when she needed it and allowed her to overcome Kylo Ren without training. She could feel when Aliana channeled the Dark Side, and it had been as soothing as when she had. It felt nothing like this cold place that screamed out for her. She peered closer. She could feel this darkness calling to her. It called to her so loudly that she could barely hear Luke anymore. This darkness had something inside of it, something that Rey needed to understand. She knew this, despite the cold, frightening, alien feeling it had, she felt herself drawn closer to it. What hid in the darkness? What did she need to find?

The ground beneath her crack, causing Rey to slide off the stone. Her senses snapped back to herself as she hastily grabbed onto the stone, keeping her from falling off of the cliff. Her breath was heavy and ragged, as if she had just pulled herself from the sea.

“That place!” she gasped, her face cold and wet all of a sudden. “It tried to show me something!”

“It offered you what you needed,” Luke said, standing back from her and turning back toward the temple, “And you didn't even try to stop yourself...”

Rey looked up at him, and something occurred to her. During her meditation she could feel herself. Her energy. Like a grey fog, thick and unyielding. And she could feel Aliana, lit up in bright red like a flame. But she couldn't feel Luke at all. He simply hadn't been there. Like a ghost or a specter, “...But I didn't see you. Nothing from you...” Luke slowly turned around, eyeing her suspiciously. “You've closed yourself off from the Force...” Something flickered across Luke's face, sorrow, terror... guilt. A stone dropped into Rey's stomach. “...Of course you have.”

“I've seen this raw strength only once before...” Luke said in a foreboding tone. “In Ben Solo... it didn't scare me enough then. It does now.” The old Jedi turned and retreated back into the stone temple, leaving Rey utterly confused.

“Master, what do you mean?” Rey asked, struggling to her feet and following him into the temple, “What was that place?”

Luke didn't answer right away. He seemed lost in the gently rippling pool in the center of the room. “...It was the darkness of this world,” Luke said. “The darkness that's kept me hidden for this long. The darkness that caused others strong in the Force to fall to the Dark Side. Countless eons ago.”

“But... But that doesn't make any sense!” Rey exclaimed. “That can't be the Dark Side! I know what the Dark Side feels like!”

“Do you?” Luke said, his tone both accusatory and curious.

“...Yes,” she said, feeling as though she had admitted to something wrong all of a sudden. “It protected me from Kylo Ren. It gave me strength. It felt nothing like it did just now.”

“There are many powers that hide in the darkness,” Luke said. “Powers and forms we could not possibly hope to comprehend, much less see. They all have one thing in common, however. They call out to those who will listen. The weak willed who will fall and become consumed.”

“Then why didn’t it consume me on Ilum?” Rey asked, now desperate to know why it had felt so different then, “Why doesn’t it consume Darth Amorosa now?”

“Amorosa can only ever feel the Dark Side,” Luke said matter-of-factly. “It has already consumed her, and it shall eventually destroy her.” Rey felt a surge of indignance on Aliana’s behalf flow through her, though decided not to voice it. “If she were to take you on as her apprentice, you would become strong enough to overpower and destroy her. That is the cycle of the Sith, Rey. It’s a beast that devours itself and all in its wake until there’s nothing left. The Jedi are the stones that think themselves infallible until they, too, are destroyed.” Luke narrowed his gaze at Rey once more. “ You stand at a crossroad, Rey. Which shall you be?”

Rey sat down on the steps and thought about what Luke said. Aliana couldn’t have been consumed by the Dark Side. She’d seen what being consumed by the Dark Side looked like in Kylo Ren. But she saw Aliana much differently. The Dark Side even felt differently around her. She thought to when she was feeling the Light. It was made up of so many things, even death and decay feeding new life...

“Master, what *is* the Dark Side?” Rey asked.

Luke’s attention turned back down to the small pool. “It is... the unknowable,” Luke replied. “It is the secrets of the Force that will forever be beyond anything but the Force itself. It is what countless Force Users have dedicated their lives to understanding only to be twisted and destroyed by its corruption. It’s always there, ever tempting, ever seductive, but once it gets a hold of you, you sink deeper and deeper until you lose all sense of yourself. Until you are a broken husk of the person you once were. A shadow. That is the Dark Side, Rey. It exists to challenge the light. The only way to defeat it is to stay away.”

Rey frowned. Luke’s words sounded... alarmist. Like he was afraid.

“I think I should ask Amorosa,” She said aloud as she stood up, “She’s experienced the Dark Side. Her wisdom could be valuable.”

Luke scoffed and turned away, muttering something under his breath that Rey didn’t hear. Her frown deepened, unhappy with how this lesson had ended and turned to leave the temple. Her thoughts on the way back to the ship were turbulent and full of questions. She still didn’t understand why the darkness she felt earlier felt so much different to the darkness she had relied on before. Worse off, it seemed that Luke was unwilling to explain to tell her why, or perhaps he didn’t even know. His unwillingness to understand the Dark Side seemed to suggest as such.

She left this lesson with more questions than she had before. Perhaps even fewer answers too. This training was proving to be quite difficult.

“Alie?” Rey asked as she stepped back onto the Fury. She glanced around the living area, but didn’t see her Sith anywhere. Wait, *her* Sith? Rey shook her head and frowned. That was odd. She turned to the cargo bay, where she could hear the sound of sparks and the crackling of a torch. She pushed open the door and found Aliana there, hunched over the workbench and a slew of small machine parts scattered over the table. “Alie?” she called again.

Aliana looked up and smiled, “Oh Rey, back already?”

“Yeah,” Rey nodded. “The first lesson was... odd.”

“Odd? How so?” Aliana asked, tilting her head slightly.

“It started out fine. We began with sensing the energy of the island,” Rey explained, thankful that at least her ability to sense things through the force seemed sharper now. “But we began discussing the Dark Side and things became... confusing.” She wrapped her arms around herself, as if she could still feel the chill of the darkness from before. “I felt the darkness on this island and... it didn’t feel like the Dark Side. At least, not how I ever felt it. I didn’t know what it was.”

Aliana turned her seat around and pulled a stool over for Rey to sit down on, “What did it feel like? And how did it feel before?”

“It was... cold and sad. It was calling to me, desperately,” Rey explained, “But before when I used it on Ilum, and whenever I feel it from you... it’s warm and comforting.”

Aliana’s brow furrowed and she took Rey’s hands in her own. Almost instantly, Rey felt that warm and soothing feeling through the Force. The Dark side enveloping her like a protective cloak. She felt powerful, and confident. She felt nothing like she had during her meditation.

“The Dark Side is always calling to those who wield it. The Force wants Force Users to surrender to it’s will and immerse themselves completely in it,” Aliana explained, a confused expression on her face. She had never had to put this feeling to words before, and was finding it difficult to truly convey what the Dark Side felt like, “The Jedi call this becoming One with the Force, where it destroys them and leaves no trace of them behind. But the Dark Side is a lot stronger with that pull, because it’s the deepest part of the Force. Like the ocean, it’s dark and cold and there are many unsolved mysteries at its farthest depths.”

Rey nodded. “Luke said as much earlier. You sink deeper and deeper until you lose all sense of yourself, but...” she paused, realizing she may have been squeezing Aliana’s hand as she held it. “...But it never felt like that before, and I still don’t understand why.”

“That’s because the key to the Dark Side is to not surrender,” Aliana explained, “You said the island was calling to you. It was baiting you. It wanted you to follow it, like a fly into a spider web. Like an Angler Fish baiting it’s prey with a comforting light. You don’t follow it. You make it come to you. The Force is a tool to be used, and if you let it control you, it *will* .”

Rey processed that information for a moment. “...I see,” she said softly. “I didn’t seek out the Dark Side on Ilum. It just came to me as a response to my rage. It-It was a rush, but I was still in control.” Her face lit up as the pieces fell into place. “That’s why it felt different! Because I was controlling the Dark Side, not succumbing to it!”

“Exactly!” Aliana smiled, “Whether it’s the Dark Side or the Light Side, don’t let the Force control you. Because that is how it destroys you. The Force is an ally, whose allegiance is conditional.”

Rey sighed contently. Everything made much more sense now. The Darkness on this island wanted her to surrender to it, but she could command the Darkness. She did so before. So long as she could stay in control, she would be fine. Then she remembered what Luke said. Telling her to just flee from the darkness whenever she felt it, and frowned.

"A shame," she said. "Master Skywalker doesn't seem to understand the Dark Side. He seems more content to fear it, like you said."

"Most Jedi do, because they're taught to fear the Dark Side," Aliana nodded, "Luke probably learned it from his Master, who learned it from theirs, and so on up the chain. It's funny actually. He has such disdain for the Jedi for their mistakes, yet he repeats their biggest failure of them all."

"Running away?" Rey guessed before she realized Aliana's true meaning. "Oh right... fearing the darkness in general."

"The Jedi believe that the Force is an inherently light entity, and that the Dark Side is a corruption of it," Aliana continued. "Some of them will talk about bringing the Force into balance, but it always means the same thing. They think they're the only ones in tune with the will of the Force."

"The will of the Force?"

"The Jedi have always had this philosophy about listening to the will of the Force. It's been their only consistent track for thousands of years," Aliana explained. "But it's not the only track to run."

"Well yeah," Rey nodded. "There's also the Sith track."

"No, I'm not talking about that, Rey. The Jedi and the Sith are... organizations. They're people coming together for a mutual purpose. But the fact that the Jedi listened to the will of the Force for everything was one of the biggest criticisms of the Jedi in their hayday," Aliana explained. "There were individual Jedi and Sith who moved away from that attitude. One Jedi believed in what he called the Living Force. We don't fully understand the Force, Rey. These are all theories and suggestions that people make. Nobody really knows what the will of the Force is, they speculate."

Rey's brow furrowed slightly as she turned that information over in her head. "So the Jedi path isn't necessarily the *right* path... just the most widely accepted," she reasoned.

"The Jedi path was *created* by the Jedi," Aliana corrected her. "Rey if you only ever listen to one thing I tell you, let it be this. If the Jedi are going to exist, they need to *stand* for something. And when your training is complete, you will be the only Jedi left in the galaxy. What their path is, and what they stand for, is going to be completely up to you because the Jedi are a *construct*. The Force didn't create the Jedi. The Force cares nothing for the Jedi. The Republic is the one that wants them to return. If the Jedi and Sith disappeared tomorrow, the Force would not care because it exists without them."

Rey's eyes widened slightly at that. In truth, it wasn't something she had considered before. She had always figured that the Jedi just lived to uphold this mantra that the galaxy at large accepted to be truth. That their purpose was pre-ordained. But Aliana was right. If Rey was going to be the only Jedi left in the galaxy, what that would ultimately mean was up to her. She would get to decide what the Jedi would become going forward. Such a truth felt... *liberating*.

"So... I can choose my own path," she whispered, slightly marveled at her own statement.

"Exactly," Aliana smiled. "Look, do you see me trying to conquer the galaxy?"

"No," Rey shook her head.

“Exactly. Because *I* am the Dark Lady of the Sith. And that means the Sith will be whatever I decide they will be,” Aliana said. “And I’ve decided that the Sith are going to fight *for* the people who’ve been exploited by the superpowers in the galaxy, not against them. The First Order, the Hutts, the Republic, all of it. The Sith are all about strength, and there’s no greater strength than defending the weak.”

Rey gasped softly at Aliana’s words. “Alie, that... that’s so profound,” she said, a smile growing on her face. “I’m impressed.”

Aliana giggled and looked away bashfully. “I’ve had a long time to philosophize on the Force, Rey. And to decide what the Sith are going to be. It’s alright for you to take time to discover what kind of Jedi or Sith you want to be as well.”

Rey giggled in kind. “It is honestly so relieving to know that,” she said. “Alright then. I suppose I should take some time to give that all some thought. Maybe meditate on it or something.”

“That already makes you better than most Jedi,” Aliana said with a smirk.

Rey felt a bashful smile spread across her face. “Oh, hush you,” she scoffed, despite her blush.

“No really, you’ve understood in five minutes what most Jedi spend a lifetime failing to learn,” Aliana smiled brightly, squeezing her hands briefly before letting go, “You’ve just made it that much harder for the First Order to turn you to their cause.”

Rey tried to ignore the flurry of emotions that threatened to burst from her chest as she focused on the conversation. “Psh, as if Kylo Ren could convince me to stand anywhere near him without me wanting to stab his slimy face,” She sneered. “I don’t know what the rest of the galaxy is on about when they claim to be afraid of him.”

“To those without a lightsaber, even Kylo Ren can seem dangerous,” Aliana nodded as she stood up, laying a cloth over what she’d been working on and leading Rey out of the cargo hold, “But my point is that I’m proud of you.”

“Thanks,” Rey said, placing a hand on Aliana’s shoulder. “It certainly helps to have such a good teacher,” she said with a smile. Rey’s attention was pulled from the unfairly beautiful Sith before her and down towards her pant leg where she felt a tug. The Porg from last night stood at her feet and was pulling on the hem of her trousers with it’s mouth. “Well hello, you. You sure you want to eat that? I don’t think it’s going to taste very good.”

“He’s been trying to eat everything,” Aliana said, stooping down and lifting the Porg into her arms, “Even tried to pull the wires out of 2V to make a nest. I had to shred an old cloak to give him fibres for it and he loved them, yes he did,” she cooed, stroking the Porg’s head.

“With all due respect, Alie, you’re not actually going to keep him, are you?” 2V asked, his synthetic voice full of worry. “I am not programmed to tend to wildlife.”

“Have a heart, 2V!” Rey said with a slight pout before stroking the Porg’s stomach with a finger. “The poor little fella’s got nowhere else to go.”

“I can tend to him just fine, 2V, I’m a big girl,” Aliana smirked at the droid, “I can even cook my own meals and get dressed by myself. Isn’t it wonderful?”

2V said nothing and simply tilted his head from side to side. Aliana's smirk fell and she laid a hand on the droid's shoulder.

"Really, I can take care of one small animal. You don't need to worry."

"Very well, Alie," 2V nodded in concession. "I shall leave the creature's necessities in your care then and shall handle my duties aboard the ship around that." With that, the droid made his way back to the cockpit.

"So is the little fellow going to have a name?" Rey asked, eyeing the Porg as it enthusiastically teathed on her finger.

"I haven't decided on one yet," Aliana shrugged, "I've just been calling him Little Guy for now."

"You should name him after something you really care about, like Fury," Rey said with a cheeky smile.

"I don't think you want me to do that," Aliana snickered.

"And why not?" Rey asked, her smile turning curious.

"Because if I did, we'd have two Jedi on this ship," Aliana replied, seeing the red that coated the other woman's cheeks as a victory.

"You're ridiculous," Rey said, covering her blush.

"You walked into that one, and don't try to deny it," Aliana grinned as she walked away, continuing to stroke the Porg's head and leaving Rey alone with her embarrassment.

Despite the moment of teasing, Rey couldn't help but feel pleasantly warm under Aliana's near constant care and praise. Leaving her training, she felt confused and anxious. In the presence of the Sith, she felt warm and content. A part of her began to wonder if there really was a reason to try and keep this wall between them anymore, which wasn't to say she was very good at keeping that wall up in the first place. Her brow furrowed slightly as she thought about it. Was this a sign that she wasn't meant to be a Jedi? That her affinity with the Dark Side, and her fondness of Aliana was giving her a different calling?

Rey swiftly shook her head clear of those thoughts. No. She had only just begun her training. She wasn't going to back out now because of some honeyed flattery from Alie. She would see this training through and then decide which path she would take. When that time came, she would do as Aliana said. She would take control of it, not surrender to it.

"You seem troubled, Miss Rey." 2V chimed in, bringing Rey away from her inner thoughts. "Do you require assistance in anything?"

Rey blinked and looked at 2V, as an idea started to form in her head, "2V, does the Fury have any Jedi literature I could study?"

"Oh, an entire archive, Miss Rey! Darth Alora downloaded 85% of the archives in the Jedi Temple on Coruscant when she visited there during the Clone Wars," 2V said happily.

85% certainly sounded like a lot. "Excellent!" Rey said with a pleased smile. "Would you show me how to access it?"

“Certainly,” 2V replied happily, leading Rey over to the holo terminal in the center of the room. The terminal lit up and a series of cube shaped holograms appeared before them. “Darth Alora placed much of the general data in the ship’s main computer. You can access them here or download them onto a datapad to read in the privacy of your quarters. Anything that isn’t in the computer itself are likely in the Jedi holocrons that Alie keeps safely stored away.”

“Can I access the holocrons?” Rey asked, not entirely certain what a holocron actually was.

“You are authorized to, but I recall Alie saying something about needing to use the Force to open a holocron,” 2V said, “You may need her assistance if your skills are not developed enough to open it yourself.”

“Ah, I’ll remember that. Thank you,” Rey said with a polite nod. A part of her wondered if she should ask for Aliana’s help with the holocrons or wait until she was further along in her training.

“I am honestly quite surprised that you requested access to such information here,” 2V remarked. “Surely your new master would have the entirety of the Jedi teachings to offer you.”

“Master Skywalker is... odd. Something has him scared of the Jedi’s return. I think it’s best that I study on my own between lessons,” Rey explained as she looked through all the headers in the ship’s databanks trying to find something she could start with. She frowned when she realized that everything was sorted by rank, and she had no idea what the rank for a brand new Jedi would be, “2V, what’s the introductory rank?”

“For Sith, it is Acolyte. For Jedi, it is Youngling, Miss Rey,” 2V explained.

“Ah, I see,” Rey nodded, the order starting to make sense in her mind. “And Apprentice is intermediate?” she asked.

“For Sith it is,” 2V specified. “For Jedi, it is Padawan. Then Knight, then Master.”

“Got it, thanks.” Rey replied politely.

“You are most welcome, Miss Rey. Was there anything else?” 2V prompted.

“That’ll be all, 2V. Thank you,” Rey smiled at the droid as she took several first-rank documents and put them onto a Datapad to read in her quarters.

The Jedi archives held a wealth of knowledge on the Force. Rey had spent four straight hours reading through texts on the Jedi Code and the nature of the Force. She found a lot of the information on feeling the Force around her to be fascinating, but was troubled by a great deal of the Jedi’s rules and regulations. Aliana had been right when she said that the Jedi and the Force were not inherently linked with one another, and she was surprised when she realized how she had echoed Luke’s words about the vanity of saying that the Force belonged to the Jedi.

She smiled as she pictured the look on Luke’s face when she told him that he and the Sith agreed on something.

Where Rey stopped cold was as she read through the Jedi’s interpretation of the Jedi Code, and about their ban on Jedi falling in love. She’d heard about it from Aliana, but reading the text for herself made it clear that she had only given the abridged version of the story. The Jedi were so

strict about it that they would exile Jedi for falling in love and even, in some cases, cut them off from the Force entirely out of the fear they would fall to the Dark Side when let out into the galaxy. This forced her to stop and consider whether such a decree was unjust or not. Was this strict taboo an example of one of the Jedi's failings or was there genuine reason for this madness. She knew that Anakin Skywalker's fall to the Dark Side was rooted in forbidden love. If the Jedi were made aware of this affair and severed his ties to the Force, would the Empire never have risen? Or did it rise solely because that forbade love at all?

A part of her wondered why she was so stuck on this particular excerpt in the Jedi teachings. It was then she remembered the undeniable attraction she felt for the woman to whom this ship and this data belonged to. Would her attraction to Aliana compromise her training here? Rey's head wracked around the question with no clear answer in sight. She felt as though she should ask for a second opinion on this, but she knew that neither source she could go to on this planet were especially unbiased, especially Aliana. 'Perhaps the Porg would have some sort of miraculous insight in this regard?' Rey thought to herself, half joking.

Rey paused. There was another person she could ask. Realizing this, she stood up from where she was studying in her quarters to her personal holoterminal. Pressing a few buttons she sent out a call that was answered by a Resistance soldier.

"Hello, yes. This is Rey," she greeted. "Could you get me the General, please?"

"One moment, patching you through," the soldier said, and after a few moments Leia appeared on the terminal. She smiled at Rey, clearly happy to hear from her.

"Rey, how are you? How's your training?" she asked.

"It's going... well," Rey answered. "I'm starting to get the basics down. Sensing through the Force, learning the Jedi Code and so forth."

"That's great to hear!" Leia exclaimed with a warm smile on her face. "We all wish you the best of luck, Rey."

"Thank you, General," Rey said with a polite bow. "It's just... there's something I wanted to get your opinion on."

"Oh, of course dear!" Leia replied. "I'm always happy to help."

"I've been going over this particular tenant of the Jedi code... the restrictions on love and attachments," Rey specified. "I'm not sure what to make of it. What do you think?"

Leia's brow furrowed, "That's an odd one. It always made sense objectively, love makes fools of us all and a Jedi needs to be unbiased. But it always seemed... callous. Luke never really taught it to his students because he believed that the Force ran stronger in families. But I don't recall him ever objecting to it either. Personally I think the Jedi should be taught how to experience love responsibly, but outright bans only stunts a Youngling's emotional growth."

"I see," Rey said. That certainly made sense. The Jedi often took in their future members as young as possible. Training children what and what not to feel seemed... disturbed to say the least. Almost militant. Such a practice seemed counterintuitive to the Jedi philosophy of using the Force for knowledge and defense. Not attack.

“So... as long as a Jedi understands the risks of becoming attached to others and is taught to experience those emotions with care, then outright restricting the very concept of love is unnecessary.”

“Exactly,” Leia said with a smile. “But hey, that’s just one former Jedi’s opinion.”

“Former?” Rey asked, arching a brow.

“I went through the training that Luke provided,” Leia clarified. “I just never technically finished my last night of training.”

“How come?” Rey asked, tilting her head curiously.

Leia hesitated and seemed to break eye contact with Rey, “I... found my calling elsewhere.”

As much as Rey suspected that Leia wasn’t being honest, the fact that she had experienced the same thing Rey had started to overpower her suspicions with excitement in someone that she could better relate to, “Really? Because I think I’m starting to feel that as well.”

Leia blinked. “Really? Why is that?”

“The more I learn of the Jedi way and Master Luke, the less certain I am that the Jedi path doesn’t quite seem... right for me,” Rey explained.

Leia’s look of curiosity turned into a somewhat deadpan frown. “Is my brother giving you trouble, dear? Do I need to go down there and straighten him out?”

“Oh no, no! Master Skywalker is doing fine... all things considered,” Rey assured her. “It’s just that he isn’t quite what I expected, nor is the Jedi training. It feels as though every answer just raises more questions.”

Leia’s frown only worsened at this, “Rey... exactly what path have you felt yourself being pulled toward?”

Rey resisted the urge to bite her lip in front of Leia. She wasn’t sure whether she should be completely honest with the General. She demonstrated a clear bias against Aliana and her beliefs even though so far she did little to deserve such treatment. Beyond that, she still had her suspicions that Leia was withholding some truth to her as well. Turnabout is fair play, after all. “I’m not sure,” she said trying to sound convincing. “Master Luke says I’m at a crossroad, but I don’t seem to be feeling a ... pull, one way or the other. I just don’t feel as though I’m taking to the lessons the way a Jedi should. At this point, I’m wondering if this path is truly right for me.”

Leia retained her pazaak face, but Rey could see in her eyes that a panic was happening. A deeply personal one at that. Still, she didn’t say anything else and only nodded, “I see... I hope you find your path soon, Rey.”

Rey was surprised. She hadn’t quite expected such a response, and smiled, “Thank you, General.”

As she cut the transmission, Rey laid back down on her bed. Her mind drifted to what her path might actually be. While she had every intention to complete her training, she still wasn’t quite sure if being a Jedi was right for her. If it was where she truly felt at home. But if it wasn’t here, where was it? Rey had spent so long desperately wishing for her family to come back for her, and now

that she'd managed to abandon that dream, accept that it would never happen, she felt... aimless. Like she was drifting through the galaxy.

She rolled over and closed her eyes, pushing her datapad away. The more she thought about it, the less enthusiastic about the Jedi she became.

Aliana was awoken from her nap by the holoterminal beeping. Whoever it was that decided to call her must have had a good reason for doing so, or she'd soon find out if she could choke people through a communications transmission. She dragged herself off of her bed and tidied up her hair before slapping the holoterminal.

"General Leia?" she mumbled, rubbing her eyes, "What do you want?"

"What have you said to Rey?" Leia asked, her tone less than friendly.

Aliana rubbed her eyes and groaned. "You're going to have to be a little more specific. I've said a lot of things to Rey."

"She contacted me, saying she doesn't believe the Jedi way is right for her. What did you say to her to put that idea in her head."

Aliana's eyes widened slightly. Rey was talking to Leia about her training? Why- she stopped that train of thought, knowing she had exactly zero stones to throw there. She sighed and rested her hand against her palm as she spoke to Leia. "Why Leia, you've mistaken me for some sort of scoundrel. A cackling empress to whom-"

"Amorosa," Leia interrupted, her tone becoming increasingly hostile.

"I don't know what to tell you. Rey's been training with Luke. I delivered your padawan over to the Jedi for training like a good little *kinta*," she said, her voice growing harsher and more bitter. "The most I ever said was that the Jedi were not the last word on the Force, and as the last of them she gets to decide what they become."

Leia's eyes widened, "You did WHAT?!"

"Well I wouldn't have told her if she hadn't come asking about it," Aliana scoffed, "Rey was already questioning what Luke told her about the Dark Side. She said something about it feeling cold and frightening on the island, but warm and soothing when she used it on Ilum. I think something in Skywalker's training freaked her out and she's been having an identity crisis over it."

"Encouraging her to embrace the Dark Side is not helping matters!" Leia said through gritted teeth.

"I didn't tell her to embrace, only to not fear it! Kriffing Hell, you Jedi are drama queens," Aliana said dismissively. "Look, I'm not doing anything to obstruct Rey's training. She even has access to all the Jedi teachings I keep in the ship's computer."

"And how exactly did you get a hold of those teachings?" Leia asked accusingly.

"I believe in the Republic, possession is nine-tenths of the law?" Aliana replied with a cheeky grin.

"Amorosa!"

“So I preserve the Jedi teachings for the next generation of Jedi, and somehow I’m still the bad guy here?” Aliana rolled her eyes, “Look, I don’t know what to tell you. If Rey is considering embracing the Dark Side, she hasn’t said anything to me. She doesn’t tell me anything, she doesn’t trust me. I can sense that greasy Jedi in her head somehow and she STILL won’t confide in me.”

Leia’s glare only intensified at Aliana. Even after Kylo Ren skewered Han, she still didn’t like people talking ill about her son in her presence. “...The sooner she comes to her senses and puts you out of our collective misery, the better,” she said, venom dripping from every word.

Aliana froze for a moment, her eyes widening slightly. She'd known that Leia didn't trust her, but to so openly wish for her death...

“Then I will make sure to do nothing else that will influence her decision in that regard,” Aliana said sarcastically. “Was there anything else you wished to pester me about, Princess?”

“Well now that you mention it-”

“Good,” Aliana said, cutting the transmission.

She sat back on her bed and curled her knees up to her chest. As she tried to meditate on the Dark Side, her anger at Leia’s words only burned brighter. That Leia has so openly wished for Rey to kill her had stung a lot more than she thought it would. “Miserable Jedi,” she seethed, “I helped save the Republic, and personally brought Rey to Luke, and she has nothing to say to me but accusations and a deathwish.”

Her mind drifted to something she’d been trying to avoid thinking about. Leia being Luke’s sister. Maybe it was just something that had run in their family. Her first encounter with Luke Skywalker had resulted in her leaving Corellia without her mother. Leia wishing for her death while she was stuck on a planet with her mother’s killer only brought that memory to the forefront of her mind. She felt tears coming to her eyes as those memories returned with a vengeance. She missed her mother so much. If there was ever a time she could use her wisdom, it was now: Stuck on a Jedi planet, taking orders from two Skywalkers, and having fallen so hopelessly in love with the woman they were hedging all their bets on that she couldn’t bring herself to just cut her losses and leave. Sadly, Mayrik hadn’t left so much as a holorecording for her to listen to. All she had were her memories.

Aliana couldn’t bring herself to resist anymore, and simply crossed her arms over her knees and laid her head down in them as she broke down into tears.

The sounds of Aliana’s sobs echoed gently throughout the ship. Rey was already in a deep sleep and didn’t hear them. One other did, however. 2V-R8 stepped into her quarters to see a sight he was very familiar with. He walked over to the Sith, an old cloak in his hands as he draped it over her shoulders. There was little comfort he could give Aliana whenever she got like this, but he did what he could.

“I miss her too, Miss Alie,” 2V said. A sentiment that sounded more genuine than ever considering he no longer referred to her as 'My Lady.'

“It’s not about her... well it kind of is,” Aliana said, lifting her tear-streaked face and looking at the droid, “Skywalker’s sister just told me she hopes Rey kills me.”

2V's processor whirred slightly louder as he considered this information. "Alie... you should understand by now that Miss Rey would never do that," 2V replied. "Even if the General were to command her to."

"She threatened to," she confessed. "On the way back from Ilum, she pulled the ship out of Hyperspace and refused to move if I didn't tell her everything."

That was the first time Aliana spoke of that incident out loud. She had never been more terrified in her life, drifting in First Order space in a ship that she couldn't fly and could barely hold its own against a corvette. And Rey knew this. Rey knew she was putting a metaphorical gun to her head. She knew she had Aliana dead to rights. Even if Aliana incapacitated her, she didn't know how to get the ship back into Hyperspace. And Rey was more than willing to die in space before bringing a Sith back to the Resistance.

Aliana hadn't stopped thinking about that moment. It remained in the back of her mind as she tried to earn Rey's trust back. It was why she pushed Rey to come here on the Fury rather than follow her onto the Falcon. She didn't want to step onto that freighter ever again, nor be so powerless in the face of someone else's ire. And despite her desire to earn Rey's trust back, she didn't want to ever give Rey the chance to hold her hostage like that again. She might have been depressed, broken, and desperate for human contact, but she wasn't so far gone she would just allow herself to be abused.

But now, wedged between the Skywalkers and a distrustful Padawan... she wondered if any of this was worth it.

"She's been trying so hard to keep distant from me, I don't know if she really would or not. And that Leia just said that directly to my face... maybe I should just go. Fly off and let the Resistance sort itself out. They don't need me, they don't even want me here."

"...If it is your choice to dissociate from the Resistance, I shall do everything in my ability to assist you in that regard," 2V said plainly. "However, I only find it prudent to remind you that, General Organa aside, your presence has been welcomed by the vast majority of the Resistance. Captain Dameron's messages to you carry a peculiar degree of familiarity and fondness."

Aliana was quiet for a moment. She'd known that the Resistance thought of her as a hero, but she didn't think it went beyond the usual deification of Force Users. And while Poe had remained on friendly terms with her, he was the only one who did. Much of the Resistance leadership had either ignored her or outright rebuked her when she was on D'Qar.

"You think I should tell him what Leia said to me?" she asked.

"If he holds you in as high esteem as your previous encounters would suggest, I cannot imagine he would be happy with the General for her disrespectful behavior," 2V replied.

Aliana stared down at the barely-started lightsaber she'd failed to get any work on, and presented her next question a lot more quietly, "...Do you think I should tell Rey?"

"Well it could help us ascertain whether she would truly follow through with such an act," 2V said, a hint of worry seeping into his voice box. "If she would, I do not think we should keep her aboard the ship."

"Maybe you're right..."

“That... that’s horrible,” Poe’s holo-image said as Aliana relayed to him what had transpired in her transmission with Leia, “I’m so sorry, Lady Amorosa, I don’t know what’s gotten into her. She’s normally very cordial and pragmatic, but any time your name is mentioned it’s like she becomes a completely different person. I promise that I’ll look into it. There’s a few Admirals who’s ear I can pull. At the very least I can annoy her for you.”

“Thanks Poe,” Aliana smiled, thankful that the holo-image didn’t show how bloodshot her eyes were, “I appreciate that.”

She turned off the holoterminal and sighed in relief, only to look up and see Rey standing in the doorway to her quarters, looking confused.

“How much of that did you hear?” Aliana asked cautiously.

“I only caught what Poe had just said,” Rey answered, brushing a loose strand of hair away from her face. “What was he talking about?”

Aliana clutched her own sides as she avoided eye contact with Rey, “I got a transmission from Leia an hour ago. She was accusing me of leading you off the Jedi Path and coercing you to the Dark Side.”

“That’s just par for the course with her,” Rey sighed as she sat down beside her, “You look like you’ve been crying.”

Aliana was quiet for a moment, and said “She told me she hoped you put me out of their collective misery...”

Confusion on Rey’s face turned to worry and then shock. She gasped sharply, unable to believe what she just heard. “Aliana,” she said softly before instinctively reaching for one of the other woman’s hands. “You know I would never do that. Not even if Leia told me to.”

“You wouldn’t?” Aliana said, finally making eye contact with her.

“I... of course not,” Rey said, concerned by the question, “Why would you think I would?”

“You... you’ve been extremely distant with me most of the time,” Aliana said, looking down into her lap, “You don’t really talk to me unless you want to know more about the Force, or the grease stain is involved. Outside of that, you keep as far away from me as possible. I guess I just don’t know if you really would follow that order or not. You’re training to be a Jedi... killing Sith is their speciality.” She decided to keep the issue on the Falcon to herself for now.

“Alie, I-” she paused, taking a moment to truly consider Aliana’s words. She had been remarkably distant from Aliana until she needed something from her. Hell, even when she did need something from Aliana, namely involving Kylo Ren, she didn’t say anything until it became absurdly obvious that she needed help. Between that and continuing her Jedi training despite her even admitting to herself that she feels unsuited for it, she could understand why Aliana would have her doubts. She took a deep breath and squeezed Aliana’s hand gently. “I’m sorry, Aliana. I didn’t think you would take my distance so personally. I... In truth I don’t really want to be this distant from you. I only ever had been because I feel like I have to so... so that I’m certain that I’m not rushing into trusting you again. I’m honestly not that mad at you anymore, and I could never bring myself to hate you, let alone try to kill you.”

A second hand reached out to hold Aliana's as Rey continued. "And Leia's bias towards you isn't fair. She doesn't know you like I do and she doesn't bother to know you. I don't know why she's so bullheaded but I won't stand for it. The next time I talk to her I will tell her so. I promise." She took another pause as she began feeling choked up. "I'm... I'm sorry that I ever made you doubt where we stand enough to consider that I would actually try and kill you. I hope you can forgive me."

Aliana pulled a hand out of Rey's grip to wipe her eyes and nodded, "Of course..."

Rey smiled and leaned in to hug her, squeezing her shoulders tightly as she kissed her cheek, "We're okay."

Aliana smiled at that. They would still need to talk about what happened on the Falcon. But... this was certainly a start.

Chapter End Notes

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I Love You, Aliana

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Eight weeks had passed since Rey and Aliana had patched things up between them, and Rey had opted to stop putting up an artificial wall on principle. She'd come to accept that she just wasn't angry with her anymore, and that being careful about who to trust didn't mean she had to avoid her altogether. She still wasn't comfortable sharing exactly what was happening in her head with Kylo Ren, who had taken to bothering her every day since landing on Ahch To, but the two of them were able to act more like the friends they actually were.

Rey had even involved Aliana in her lessons, opting for Aliana to train her in lightsaber techniques in the temple and having Aliana occasionally sit in on Luke's lessons, much to the old Jedi's chagrin. It seemed that Luke had run out of ways to rant about the Jedi's need to die out and had resigned himself to training her in the Force once it became clear that she wasn't looking to rebuild the Jedi Order, she only want to know how to use her powers so she could help fight the First Order.

Leia hadn't bothered them since threatening Aliana, in fact Rey had suggested blocking any communications from Leia altogether and only speaking to friendly officers in the Resistance, like Poe. Poe had actually kept in regular contact, sending them status updates. Finn had yet to wake up from his coma, but his injuries were no longer life-threatening. This news had brought relief to the both of them, and had brightened their spirits a lot more as they continued Rey's training.

"No, Rey you're still swinging too wildly," Aliana said as she corrected Rey's stance with the training saber, "Makashi is about quick and controlled movements. You want to leave as few openings as possible, and exploit as many as the enemy gives you."

Rey nodded and worked to maintain the corrected stance before going through the motions once again. This time she kept the saber closer to her center, opting for quick jabs and twirls rather than wide swings. It was a bit tricky to commit to muscle memory as part of her instincts told her to keep the deadly laser blade away from her person. As she learned to trust in her own body and skill, however, the thought of keeping such a deadly weapon so close by seemed less and less daunting the more they continued to train.

With her improved form, she advanced towards Aliana once more. This time her assault was not so easily countered. Aliana's skill with a lightsaber still eclipsed her own by a significant margin, but the progress Rey had been making in their sparring sessions became more and more notable. A small smile of pride could be seen on Aliana's lips whenever Rey got close.

"Better," the Sith said with a nod. "Much better."

"Thank you," Rey said with a smile. "Now can we move on to another form? I'm starting to feel like Makashi might not be my forte."

"Sure," Aliana said, deactivating the training saber she'd been using, "Which form would you like to study next? Soresu, Djem So, or Ataru?"

Rey took a moment to consider the options. Soresu and Djem So would have been good forms to get a handle on considering how much blaster fire she would likely be deflecting on the front lines. Even so, something within her called out to the third option.

“You said Ataru works very well with a saber staff, right?” Rey asked with a certain sparkle in her eye. “Let’s try that one.”

Aliana nodded, directing Rey to sit down. As she did, Aliana levitated her lightsaber and spun it in several different arcs, “Ataru is an aggressive lightsaber form. It’s attacks are wide, but very fast. It takes a great deal of control in the Force to make full use of it, as many Jedi and Sith employ a great deal of acrobatics in order to give attacks more power and unpredictability. It’s best suited for open spaces, and the double-bladed lightsaber makes it even more deadly due to the potential unpredictability the form offers.”

She let her lightsaber drop and opened her eyes, “Before you can learn the Ataru form, you need to fully master how to use the Force to move as quickly, elegantly, and acrobatically as possible.”

Rey nodded. “Does that mean I should do a lap around the course?” she asked, gesturing to the edges of the island. When Luke realized how seriously Rey was taking her training, he opted to craft an elaborate obstacle course around the perimeter of the island. Each obstacle tested Rey’s strength speed and dexterity as well as how well she could augment each of these traits through the Force. She had managed to finish the course more quickly each time she ran it, making her quickest time approximately 45 minutes.

Aliana’s record was 20 minutes.

“The course is ideal for general endurance and quick thinking. But Ataru is a different beast,” Aliana corrected her, “What I want you to work on is using the Force to propel your jumps and control your momentum. You’re going to be doing a lot of flips and spins with this form, and you want to be able to stick your landings as well as not get dizzy.”

Rey looked over herself as she considered Aliana’s words. She was far from uncoordinated, but it sounded as though her Ataru training was going to test her body in ways she wasn’t accustomed to, even with how much progress they’ve made so far. It was something she noticed in Aliana’s movements ever since they started practicing together. In the instances the Sith did an impressively elaborate flip or a high jump, she always stuck the landing. Upon reflection such feats would not have seemed as impressive to Rey at the time if they had ended with Aliana landing on her face. She could certainly see how control was an important factor.

“Alright then,” Rey responded momentarily jogging in place to prep herself. “So where do we start?”

Aliana looked at the small path that surrounded the temple and got an idea. Using the Force, she laid rocks of varying heights around it and used her lightsaber to cut into their surfaces to give an unfriendly place to stand on. When she was finished, she looked at Rey.

“Let’s start with five laps around this, but I want you to do more than simply jump over each of these rocks. Flip, spin, vault, airborne roll, anything you can think of. Each of these rocks has to be cleared with some kind of acrobatics on each lap.”

“Alright, that sounds doable,” Rey said before stepping into place. As she looked ahead to the rocks in her way, she acknowledged how unpleasant it would be to run into any of them. Taking a deep

breath to center herself, she dashed forward to start the course, leaping into a flip over the first rock.

Aliana watched from the temple as Rey cleared every single rock on the first lap, only managing to stumble once or twice. As she started the second lap, Aliana felt Luke walk up beside her and glanced at him warily.

“She’s been making progress rather quickly,” Luke remarked.

“She’s strong, and she’s dedicated,” Aliana shrugged, “She’s determined to see this through.”

Luke kept his eyes fixed on Rey as she cleared each stone in her path with a distinct form of acrobatics. “She is... more determined than I remember seeing in a pupil in a long time,” Luke remarked quietly. “It’s... refreshing, I suppose.”

Aliana shrugged again, “I’ve never had an apprentice myself, so I have no frame of reference. But she’s learning faster than I did. Though she’s a lot stronger in the Force than I am.”

“Strength only matters in application,” Luke commented dryly. “The pursuit of raw strength in the Force is what led to the downfall of many power hungry Jedi. With the right application, even the tiniest creature could topple an empire. Just ask the locals of Endor.”

“All the more reason why I’m teaching her control,” Aliana retorted, “But strength still has its uses. Blast Doors for instance. And redirecting turbolasers. And trying to fight with two lightsabers.”

“Hmm,” Luke grunted, seemingly uncomfortable with the idea of openly agreeing with a Sith Lord. Rey made sure to mention how similar his philosophy was to Aliana’s and that fact had annoyed him ever since. “So, you’re not uncomfortable about Rey being stronger than you?” Luke asked. “Most Sith would take exception to that idea.”

“Being strong in the Force isn’t everything, Master Skywalker,” Aliana explained, “Your former apprentice is strong in the Force and he can barely use it. But no, I’m not worried about Rey potentially eclipsing me one day. On the contrary, I’d be proud of it.”

“Even though she may not walk the path of the Sith?” he countered. “You’ve not demonstrated any shame in your heritage, yet you seem to have no plan to preserve it’s future. I at least do not intend to see the Jedi outlive me. What about your order?”

Aliana shrugged, “I hadn’t really thought about it. I’d been mostly focusing on staying alive and getting through one day at a time. But... honestly I would love to rebuild the Sith Order. Share Sith history with the galaxy...” she smiled as she watched Rey circle the course, “Maybe I will take an apprentice of my own someday...”

Luke’s full beard managed to conceal the depth of his frown somewhat, although not by a huge margin. “When Darkness rises, Light will rise to challenge it,” he said, unamused by Aliana’s enthusiasm. “Ensuring a future for the Sith Order will only ensure everlasting conflict throughout the galaxy.”

“Conflict will rise regardless, Master Skywalker,” Aliana said, rolling her eyes, “And when it does, I hope I or Rey don’t turn out like you, hiding from your own shadow in the middle of nowhere while the First Order terrorizes the galaxy and murders billions. The Sith don’t need to be around for that to happen. You can see it with your own two eyes, you just don’t care.”

Luke's retort came a hair's breadth too late as the Rey reached the end of her fifth lap, an exhilarated "Whooo!" coming from the young apprentice.

"I did it!" Rey said with glee before making her way back towards Aliana. "How was that?"

"That was great! A lot better than I'd expected on your first attempt, but it was amazing!" Aliana's attention shifted from Luke to Rey, and her smile was brighter than a star, "I was clearly mistaken when I said you'd need to work on your acrobatics. You can rest for now and we'll start Ataru sequences tomorrow!"

Rey felt a pleased grin grow ever wider on her face. Praise from Aliana felt unbelievably special to her. It was almost addicting. As she collected the remainder of her gear, she turned back to look at the other woman. "I'm going to head back to the ship and catch up on some reading," she said. "Either of you need anything, you know where to find me." With that she jogged her way back to the Fury, her body still bursting with energy even after her extensive training for the day.

"Even as her training grows ever extensive, her pace is relentless," Luke noted.

"She's powerful, and meets every challenge with admirable gusto," Aliana said, moving to follow her.

That was when Luke grabbed her arm, "One mome--"

Aliana didn't hear him. She just turned on instinct and roundhouse kicked Luke directly in the jaw, sending him into the dirt. Her breathing was heavy and her hand was gripping her lightsaber. The real one. She stared Luke down as he rubbed his jaw and tried to pull himself to his feet.

"Do NOT touch me, Jedi!" Aliana snarled, her hands shaking.

Luke looked up, wide eyed at the Sith, before holding a hand up in a yielding gesture. Whether or not Rey told Aliana about him closing himself off from the Force, he didn't know. Even still, he was not in a position to try and bluff her when she already sent him to the ground. "Alright," he said in a strained tone of voice.

Aliana glared down at him and turned on her heel, running after Rey. She didn't care what he'd wanted, only about getting as far away from him as possible. She never tried to stay alone with Luke if she could help it. She could tolerate his presence when Rey was around, but without her she wanted to keep an ocean between them if possible. She caught up with Rey halfway down the mountain as she clipped her lightsaber back to her belt, "Didn't think I'd stay up there with him, did you?"

Rey shook her head. "Certainly not," she said, welcoming Aliana's presence. As they continued down the mountain a flicker of concern crossed Rey's face. "I thought I heard you yelling earlier. Is everything ok?" she asked.

"Luke grabbed my arm," Aliana said, shrugging, "I don't like it when Jedi Masters put their hands on me."

Worry etched itself harder into Rey's expression. "Oh, dear, Alie," she said softly. "Does he... does he know about what happened?" she asked.

Aliana was quiet. Luke didn't seem to recognize her. Or if he did, he didn't say anything about it, "If he does, he didn't hear it from me," she said simply. She had been avoiding telling Rey about who exactly had killed her mother until after her Jedi training. She had told her that she wasn't ready to share that information, so it wasn't like she was keeping it secret. But as she and Rey grew closer, she didn't want to jeopardize her training.

Rey frowned and reflexively reached out for Aliana's hand. "I..." she felt the words hang in her throat, as if she still wasn't sure how best to order them. "I know that being among Jedi can't be easy for you, so... I just want you to know that I appreciate all you've done since we arrived. I hope there's a way I can make it up to you someday." She finished that thought by gently squeezing Aliana's hand. "So, you know, don't be afraid to think of a list that would help me do that."

Aliana smiled and shook her head, "Isn't really anything I can think of." That was the first outright lie she'd told to Rey since promising never to do so again. There was something she could think of, but she'd never ask Rey to try to return her feelings out of a sense of debt. The very idea seemed horrific to her. Nevertheless, she'd been letting her mind wander more and more, imagining a scenario where Rey actually did feel the same way about her.

It made reality a lot harder to deal with at times.

Rey smiled and leaned against Aliana as they continued on their way back to the Fury. Ever since they had their talk, she rarely wanted to leave the other woman's side. On top of recognizing just how much Aliana has accomplished and put herself through for her and for a Resistance who still struggled to respect her, she was such a comforting and welcomed presence in general. Smart, funny, capable in anything that didn't involve ship maintenance and unjustly beautiful to boot. Her smile was captivating. Her figure was immaculate, even under her Sith robes. Her eyes were borderline hypnotic. Her scent of roses and cinnamon was unbelievably soothing. Everything about Aliana just made Rey want to be closer to her.

A part of her was beginning to question exactly what that meant regarding how she felt towards Aliana, but Rey seldom had a moment to reflect on it, between their engaging conversations, the extensive training, the studying of Jedi text and growing continuously frustrated by her hallucinations of the insufferable Dark Jedi. Everytime she considered taking a moment to think about it, something else demanded her attention.

As if on cue, her stomach started to churn loudly.

"...Eh... I don't suppose it would be adding onto the list of debts I owe you by asking when dinner is?" she asked sheepishly.

"Whenever I can find time to get something on the fire," Aliana shrugged, "I've got some practice of my own to do."

"Practice with what?" Rey asked, raising an eyebrow.

"A Light Sided technique I've been trying to work out," Aliana explained, "It's a little complicated and I'm not sure if I'll actually need it, but I might. I've been trying to practice every night."

"Light Sided technique?" Rey asked curiously, her studious interest piqued. "That sounds interesting. Maybe I could try learning it?"

“Maybe. You should focus on your training for now, though,” Aliana said. In truth, the Bar’senthor’s Shielding Technique was not one that could be self-applied, which was why Aliana was working so hard to try and master it. If her theory was correct, and Rey had developed a Force Bond with Kylo Ren, she would need to have it blocked right away.

Assuming Rey trusted her enough to let her into her mind, which was no easy feat.

Rey wasn’t especially fond of using her powers to allow anything within her mind. She was more interested in pointing her senses outward. She could sense every living thing on the island, where they were, how they all behaved through the cycles of day and night and when they were in distress. It was like having an entirely new sense and Rey absolutely loved it. She was even curious about possibly navigating the island using that sense alone. Aliana objected solely on the basis that Rey sharpened her technique first before she try it.

As she extended her senses outward, she felt a living presence aboard the Fury begin to wake up from it’s nap. “I think your son is awake now,” she said cheekily to Aliana.

“A Porg is my son now? Wow, I’ve been up to more freaky things than I’d realized,” Aliana snickered as the two of them approached the ship.

The night turned out to be warmer than usual, so Rey had taken to setting up a fire in the pit of one of the huts in the temple as she read her datapads. It was a good evening, and it felt nice to be out of the ship for a while. As comfortable as it was, there were few windows and she was finding herself more and more enthralled by the changing weather on the island. It had rained the week before and despite Aliana’s insistence that she’d fall ill, she stood out in the downpour anyway marvelling at seeing rain for the first time.

Aliana had been right. She had gotten sick for a few days, and had to put training on hold while she recovered. Though on the plus side, Aliana fretted over her the entire time.

As she took a sip of the tea she’d brought with her, she felt a cold chill run up her spine. She knew this feeling. She knew it way too well. This was the feeling she got when Kylo Ren was nearby. She glared up from her datapad at the image of the Dark Jedi and glared at him, “I don’t have time for this right now.”

“Looks like you have nothing but time,” Kylo countered, eyeing how casual Rey appeared to be with the datapad and tea. “You’ve grown stronger. I can sense it. And yet you don’t seem to be any closer to severing this tie between us,” he said tauntingly.

“I’m more than strong enough to put an end to your miserable existence the next time I see you,” Rey remarked coldly. “That should do the trick.”

“Without the Sith to save you, there’s nothing you can do against me,” Kylo Ren assured her, “You aren’t the only one who’s grown more powerful these last few months. And soon enough, I’ll kill the Sith, and you will bow to me.”

Rey glared daggers at Kylo Ren as she rose to her feet. “You won’t lay a finger on her while I’m still around. We both kicked you into the dirt by ourselves. Together you have no chance!” Her knuckles were white with how hard she was clenching her fists. If Rey wasn’t careful, her anger would cause this fire pit to flare up like the last one.

She hadn't expected Kylo Ren to stand up, and she took a cautious step back when he did. He just glared her down and reached a hand out toward her. Rey felt something familiar prodding at her mind and she started to panic, clasping her hands over her head.

"So, you have feelings for the Sith after all," Kylo Ren smirked, "She isn't as powerful as she seems. She may have beaten me once, but she has a scar from me that will haunt her for the rest of her life."

"Stop it!" she said sharply, clutching her own head tighter. "Get out of my mind! You are not welcome!"

"Then cast me out like before," he replied coldly. "You wouldn't let me inside your mind if you didn't want me in here."

"Shut up!" She said, her voice cracking slightly.

"You know how vile and twisted she is," Ren continued. Creatures like her cannot know true love. The Force is strong in families. Her lust for women is anathema to that concept. She is a blight on the Force."

"Don't you dare talk about her, you scu-"

"You see how self destructive her way of life is," Kylo interrupted. "That's why you're reaching out to me. So that I can save you."

"I am not reaching out!" she screamed. "I want you out!"

"No you don't. Can't you see? The Force is connecting us," Kylo continued, reaching his tendrils deeper into Rey's mind, "It is the will of the Force that you come to me and abandon the Sith."

"Stay back, you wretch!" She cried, grabbing the pistol at her side and bringing it up to point at him. She aimed directly for his chest, knowing if she were to shoot, she wouldn't miss. Even so, she hadn't pulled the trigger yet. Her hand shook with anxiety and dread as he refused to back down.

"I will cut the Sith down," he said matter of factly. "I will purge her corruption from you. And you will fall to my feet and thank me for saving you."

Rey screamed as she pulled the trigger several times, sending blaster bolts right through him and into the wall of the hut. Regardless, she felt him retreat from her mind as he doubled over in pain and vanished from her sight. She dropped the blaster and fell back onto the seat around the fire, shaking.

That had been worse than Starkiller Base. He'd ripped deeper into her mind than she'd ever thought possible, wrenched out memories and used them to torture her. In truth, as much as she was looking forward to killing Kylo Ren, a part of her was afraid every time he appeared. He was unskilled in many ways, but his ability to break through someone's mind certainly wasn't. And that he'd done it so easily from the opposite side of the galaxy...

She covered her face in her hands and started weeping.

Aliana looked up from the lightsaber she was working on and toward the mountain temple. Something was very wrong, and she could sense it. Not knowing what it was she was looking for, she set her tools down and exited the Fury, running up toward the village. As she neared the hut that Rey had disappeared into hours earlier, she could hear the sounds of Rey crying.

She took a deep breath and knocked on the door, “Rey?” she called out.

Rey visibly flinched away from the door at the sudden sharp sound. In an intense rush of panic, she called the blaster back to her, grasping it quickly in the hand it flew to and pointed it at the broken door where Aliana now stood.

Aliana lifted her hands up immediately, conveying that she meant no harm. “Woah! Rey, it’s ok! It’s me!”

Rey’s breathing was erratic and uneven and her expression one of ever so slightly ebbing terror. “Don’t ever do that again!” she cried out. “For God’s sake! I don’t even think that door was locked!”

“OK, I’m sorry,” Aliana said, keeping her voice low and calm. “I just heard you crying and I panicked. I won’t surprise you like that again. I promise.”

Satisfied with that, Rey lowered the blaster and looked back down to the floor, trying to steady her breathing. Aliana approached slowly and sat down beside her. Rey looked like she’d just been put through hell. Like the way she’d looked when they found her on Ilum. Her breathing was ragged, her face was covered in tears, and her eyes were bloodshot. Seeing her like this made Aliana want to hold her and comfort her, but she kept her hands back.

“Rey... what happened?” she asked softly, “It looked like someone’s hurt you.”

Rey winced, hating how obviously wounded and vulnerable she appeared to be. Even around those she trusted and cared for, she hated feeling this weak in their presence. So pathetic. So... disposable.

She avoided Aliana’s eyes, still unsure as to whether or not to admit to what the Sith already knew. Rey assured her that she would find a way to deal with this herself once she started getting along with her training. However, they were already months into it and so far the hallucinations had only gotten worse. She was finally convinced that they weren’t hallucinations after all and that Kylo Ren was actually in her head somehow. Simply admitting that to herself made her want to vomit.

She wanted to prove to Aliana that she could be strong. That she could handle this on her own. Now, though... she had proved everything except that.

“...It’s Ren,” she admitted meekly, still not meeting Aliana’s eyes.

“What about him?” Aliana asked, her entire body tensing up at the idea that Kylo Ren could affect her this badly. It had been bad the day after they landed and Rey had cried in her arms, but after two months she hadn’t expected it to get even worse, “What did he do?”

“He... found a way into my mind,” Rey said barely above a whisper. “Ever since... since Starkiller base, maybe even before, I felt him. I’ve seen him right in front of me, clear as day. I thought it was just some Force based hallucination or something but...” her voice was cracking hard, fear and

shame gripping her once more. “But he’s actually in my mind.... And I don’t know how to get him out. It’s just getting worse! I thought I could keep him out, but it’s just getting worse!”

This confirmed Aliana’s suspicions. Rey and Kylo Ren had indeed formed a Force Bond. She quietly cursed the Force for its machinations and focused her attention on Rey, “Rey... I think I know what’s wrong.”

Rey looked up at her. Her eyes were hopeful, but they were still full of tears, “What? What’s going on?”

Aliana winced at the prospect of telling her, as she knew the information would only cause her more distress, “The Force... it will sometimes bond two people and bridge their minds. It causes them to experience each other’s emotions and communicate over long distances. It also has several other effects, but the important part is that the Force seems to have formed one of these bonds between you and Kylo Ren.”

The color all but vanished from Rey’s face. Suddenly, the words Kylo spoke just a moment ago started repeating loudly in her head. "...A bond? No! That can’t be right! I never asked for this!” she said, tears flowing freely down her face. “Aliana, I never wanted him in my head! I never reached out to him! You have to believe me!” she pleaded, grabbing Aliana by the shoulders tightly.

“Whoa whoa whoa!” Aliana said, laying her hands on Rey’s shoulders to try and calm her down, “Rey, Force Bonds don’t work that way. The Force creates them of its own volition. The two people with a Force Bond don’t get a say in the matter. I know you didn’t reach out to him, and I’m not sure why me knowing that is so important to you.” Aliana reached back and gently removed Rey’s hands from her shoulders.

A part of Rey felt relieved. This wasn’t her fault. She didn’t subconsciously reach out to the man who tortured and tried to kill her and her closest friends. She wasn’t crazy. Another part of Rey recognized the horrific implications of the Force having the ability to link her mind to her worst enemy on a whim, but tried really hard not to think about that. She looked up at Aliana, whose calm and reassuring gaze was tinted slightly in confusion. “I... “ She considered how best to phrase this without sounding ridiculous. A tricky task given the rush of unpleasant emotions she just had. "...He... suggested that I was reaching out to him so that...” the next part made her want to vomit as it came up in her throat. "...So that he could save me from you.”

Aliana’s eyes narrowed, “What a despicable...” she took a deep breath and shook her head. Now was definitely the time, “Well joke’s on him, because I think I can keep him out of your head.”

“You did it that one time, by the campsite,” Rey recalled. "...But he was back whenever you turned away. I... how can you keep him out of my head for good?”

“That’s the technique I’ve been practicing,” Aliana explained, “I... I’d suspected there might be a Force Bond between you two for a while, but you wouldn’t talk to me about it so I couldn’t be sure. In case I was right, I’ve been working on mastering a shielding technique perfected by a Jedi several thousand years ago. It can’t sever a bond, doing that is very difficult. But it can shield your mind from outside influence and block the connection. Like a signal jammer.”

Rey’s face lit up, helped in no part by Aliana explaining the process complete with a mechanical based association. “You can!? That’s wonderful!” she said, her sorrow almost entirely replaced with

glee. “How does it work? Teach me!” she insisted, as she brought a forearm up to wipe the tear streaks from her face.

“That’s the thing,” Aliana winced, “The shielding technique can’t be self-applied. It has to be applied to a person’s mind by a Force User. It was intended to protect against a mind-control power for people already under its spell. The Jedi who made the holocron teaching it didn’t leave any instructions for how to apply it to the user. If this is going to work... I’ll have to do it for you.”

As Aliana said that, Rey physically put distance between the two of them. The hope on her face vanished just as quickly as it came. Her bloodshot eyes were wide with worry and panic. “Y-You’d have to go... in my mind?” she asked, her voice somehow sounding brittle. “I... no. Come on Alie. There has to be another way! Just... tell me how the technique works and then we can figure out how to self apply it. Reverse engineer it somehow. We can do that, right?” As she spoke a weak smile came to her face, her eyes pleading for Aliana to tell her that there was another way.

Aliana’s face bore this guilty look as she looked away from Rey, “I’m sorry... I really tried but... Sith aren’t supposed to open Jedi holocrons. They’re tuned to the Light Side so only Jedi can open them. It... it shattered when I’d finished listening to the Jedi inside it...”

Rey’s heart sunk ever further downward. The instinctive, irrational part of her brain wanted to lash out at Aliana for not once consulting her about any of this before trying to learn it. Another part knows that she didn’t consult her because Rey refused to talk about it. She couldn’t muster the strength to get defensive at Aliana. Instead she looked at her with a vulnerable, defeated gaze. “Aliana, please,” she whimpers. “I-I don’t think I can handle anyone else in my head. It hurts.... So bad,” as she reflected on the complete agony Kylo’s probing had put her through, Rey felt the urge to curl up into a ball and just cry.

“I... I can try to make it as painless as possible,” Aliana said hopefully, laying a hand on her shoulder, “It’ll be difficult but... but if we don’t do something, he’ll be back like he always is.”

Rey let out a harrowed breath. This was her ultimatum. Put her trust in someone who has already broken it before, or continue to fall victim to the creature who insisted on torturing her without remorse. She wished this decision felt easier to make.

“...If I change my mind...” she began. “...If you start and I tell you to stop, at any point... will you?”

“Absolutely, you have my word,” Aliana nodded, “Nothing here happens without your express permission, I promise.”

Rey took another breath attempting to steady herself. She knew that it was either this or more of that scummy Dark Jedi.

“.... Go ahead,” she said meekly.

Aliana shifted a little closer and lifted her hand to Rey’s temple. Rey winced visibly and closed her eyes, her entire body trembling in fear. Aliana felt a pang of regret at causing such a viscerally terrified reaction in her, and resolved to make Rey’s experience as painless as she possibly could. With this resolve, she reached out with the Force and gently slipped into Rey’s mind. Once she was in, she was instantly overwhelmed by the fear, anxiety, and rage burning through her mind. It was like a maze of complicated emotions and desires. Navigating it would have been hard enough, but navigating it without disrupting anything and causing Rey agony was like trying to fly the Fury

through a hole that wasn't big enough to fit the Fury. She very slowly and carefully wormed her way in deeper, looking for where the bond with Kylo Ren was hiding.

Rey sat there, trying to keep her breathing even as Aliana worked. She could feel the Sith slip into her mind, but it was nothing like it was with Kylo. It was cautious, gentle... almost caring. She didn't try to force her way into something Rey didn't want her to see. She carefully observed what she could before moving on to other parts of her mind. At this point, all Rey was feeling was deep seated terror and anxiety for what might happen, but no actual pain of any kind. It almost made it easier to relax.

As Aliana sunk in deeper, she could hear the faint echoes of repressed memories and subconscious feelings. She blocked them out. Perhaps another time she could help Rey sift through them, but for now she wasn't here to pry into things she would rather forget. Eventually, she found the bond. A dark, pulsating presence that felt almost like a tumor. Appropriate, she thought, as that was exactly what Kylo Ren felt like. She observed and analyzed it, looking for a way to root her shielding technique.

It was no use. The bond was dug in too deep. She'd have to uproot it in order to shield her. She laid a hand on the bond itself, and traced it down looking for each and every single root she could find, mapping them out.

Rey clenched slightly. She felt Aliana find something in her mind. There was still no pain, just the shock of an unexpected feeling. Whatever it was felt tender, as if it would hurt if not handled gently, which Aliana continued to do. Rey tried once more to keep her breathing steady. She bit back the urge to tell Aliana to stop. So far it wasn't going terribly. As hard as it was, she wanted to believe Aliana could pull this off.

For something with such little raw force, extracting the bond from Rey's subconscious took a considerable amount of effort. Pulling a star destroyer out of orbit would have been easier. But one by one, each snare, root and barb of the bond was coaxed out of its anchor without disturbing Rey's mind. The amount of effort it took was already exhausting her nearly to the point of collapse, but the fact that Rey hadn't pulled away or demand that she stop meant the effort was worth it. Once the last one was free, Aliana took a deep breath and began wrapping the bond in a shimmering, golden light. This was the hardest part. The shield was a technique of the Light Side of the Force, which she had almost no affinity for. Even simple techniques like healing were always a difficult thing for her to do. She was unlike Rey or even Kylo Ren, who were attuned to both sides of the Force, indeed like most Jedi. She was only attuned to the Dark Side. This was not going to be easy for her.

Or painless.

Her muscles burnt as if she were holding two pieces of a cruiser together with her bare hands. Her mind felt as though it had been awake for three days straight. She felt as though she was nearly drained of the Force completely. Despite this, however, she persisted, feeling the strain on her body as she continued securing a shield around the bond. It was clumsy. Rudimentary. But once it was finished, it would hold for quite a long time. Rey would have to have another shield at some point, or even deal with Ren if nobody could provide one, but for now she would know peace and quiet in her mind.

Satisfied, she withdrew from Rey's mind, taking care not to disturb anything on her way out. As soon as she was free, she let go of Rey's mind and fell back, breathing heavily and feeling a dull

pain in her chest. She was beyond exhausted. It took all she had to keep from passing out.

Rey felt Aliana withdraw and opened her eyes. As the Sith promised, the process didn't hurt. But did it work? She reached out with her senses, as if trying to sense the island around her. Usually whenever she did that, Kylo Ren seemed to notice and take the moment to break through in a way she physically couldn't refuse. Maybe he did that so his claim about her reaching out to him would be more believable.

Except this time... there was nothing. No sense of familiar, suffocating darkness. No chilling feeling throughout her body. Nothing about his contemptible presence was anywhere to be found. She almost couldn't believe it.

It worked.

It actually worked!

Rey dared to smile, "Oh my god... Aliana, I think it work-" her words trailed off as she turned to see Aliana slumped over and exhausted, looking worse than she had after Starkiller Base. Rey gasped and took her by the shoulders, "Aliana, are you okay?"

Aliana pulled herself into an upright position, clutching her chest and gasping for air, "I... think so..." she winced, "That was a... very deeply rooted bond... Did it work? Are you okay?"

Rey looked Aliana over, making sure there was nothing visibly wrong with the Sith aside from fatigue before she answered. "...Yes," she said, reaching out with her senses again, just to be sure. "I don't feel him at all. Alie, you did it!" she confirmed, pure unadulterated joy on her face.

Aliana smiled at Rey and weakly squeezed her shoulder before dropping her hand onto the seat, "That's good. I can't imagine what it would feel like to have that slimeball digging around in my head." She tried to stand up, to give Rey some time to herself, but her legs screamed out in protest and she was quickly brought back down onto her seat, "Ow! Okay, not going anywhere anytime soon..."

Rey reached out to grab a hold of Aliana and steady her. Seeing how utterly spent she looked caused a flurry of emotions to grow in her. "I... I didn't think doing this would put you through this much stress," she said, resisting the urge to apologize if only because she knew Aliana wouldn't consider her at fault for any of this. "You didn't have to do this, Alie."

"Rey, I wanted to," Aliana smiled, "I've been working on mastering that technique for weeks because I wanted to help keep him out of your head. I wasn't about to just let you suffer alone, I care too much about you for that."

'That's right,' Rey thought. 'Aliana... she loves me.'

And like that, it was as if some final piece in her mind was put into place. Aliana's thoughtful caring nature towards her, her warm and soothing presence, her unparalleled beauty. The undeniable attraction Rey had towards her went beyond just physical. She didn't just want to be around Aliana for pure carnal desire. She didn't want their relationship to mend after Illum just because she was petrified of being alone again. She genuinely wanted Aliana in her life.

She loved her.

The realization alone seemed to make everything around her seem... blissful. Aliana appeared even more captivatingly beautiful than ever despite her weariness. The feeling of calm and reassurance Rey felt in her presence felt stronger but also joined with feelings of excitement and pure joy. Everything she felt for Aliana felt stronger now. It felt stronger because Rey realized the truth.

Rey found herself almost acting without thinking as she reached out and laid her hand over Aliana's, gently intertwining their fingers.

Aliana's smile faltered slightly, and she felt her cheeks grow warm. As exhausted as she was, Rey's touch was extremely soothing, and the way she clasped her fingers made her heart soar. She resisted the urge to turn her head away, aware of the fact that she was probably blushing, and gave Rey's fingers a small squeeze.

"Rey? Are you alright?" she asked, her voice almost a whisper, "You're kind of staring at me."

"Shhhh," Rey said gently. "Don't speak,"

She leaned forward and kissed her.



Her red lips were softer and sweeter than she could have ever imagined. The faint taste of cinnamon excited her. Her fingers clenched slightly around Aliana's hands as she leaned harder into the kiss. A small pleased moan rumbled from her throat and into her mouth as the sheer euphoria of the moment overwhelmed Rey's senses.

Aliana was wide-eyed and in shock as her mind struggled to catch up to the situation. Rey was kissing her? She almost couldn't believe it. This had to be a dream of some kind. But the taste of Rey's lips was too strong for it to have been a dream. She relented only when Rey whined and she just melted against her. Her eyes slipped closed and she leaned forward returned the kiss, her body still aching from exhaustion but her mind telling it to shut up and let her enjoy this.

Rey pulled away ever so slightly onto to kiss her again. Their lips gliding over one another in a mutual assured act of affection. The interwoven hands lifted from the surface of the wooden seat so that they could rest their palms against each other. Another blissful noise escaped Rey's mouth, almost curious for more when-

"What the hell is going on in here!?" Luke snapped, stepping through the broken doorway.

Aliana and Rey broke apart, looking confused for a moment, with Aliana wobbling in her seat. Rey quickly processed the situation and glared at Luke.

"Excuse me?! What are you doing barging in uninvited?!" she scoffed.

"The locals started yelling at me that there was blaster fire, screaming and a door being kicked down!" Luke exclaimed less than amused. "What am I supposed to do with that!? Ignore it!?"

"Look inside, see that we're busy and don't shout at us!?" Rey replied, irritated at Luke's interruption.

"Busy with what!? Explain the commotion!" Luke demanded.

Rey let out an exasperated sigh, pinching the bridge of her nose before looking back up at Luke. "Ever since Starkiller base, Kylo Ren has been inside my mind," she began to explain. "I tried to handle it on my own but it only got worse over time. Aliana used a shielding technique to block the connection."

"...and the kiss?" Luke asked with a raised eyebrow.

"...I think that speaks for itself," Rey said, crossing her arms at her master, "I'm a grown woman, Luke. Who I kiss is none of your business."

Luke turned his eyes toward Aliana, who was still in something of a daze from the shock of the kiss and over-exerting herself again, "Explain yourself."

Aliana pulled herself together enough to answer him, though her hand remained on her lightsaber, "There was a Force Bond between Rey and Kylo Ren, I used an ancient Jedi technique to keep Kylo Ren away from her."

Luke's eyes widened, "You blocked a Force Bond?" he asked, looking horrified.

"Yes," Aliana said, narrowing her eyes at him, "It had formed with a man who tortured her."

"Those kinds of connections are made for a reason, Sith!" Luke scowled.

"We recognize that fact, Master Skywalker," Rey interjected. "However, we came to the consensus that that reason was horrible and decided to do something about it. Any objection you have is with me as well as her!"

Luke said nothing for a moment before turning back to walk out the entranceway he came. "...You're playing a dangerous game here, Rey," he warned, his voice low and ominous. "You best make the right decision."

With his warning given, he departed.

"...Don't get your hopes up, Master," Rey said as he left.

Aliana was quiet, wringing her hands as she avoided eye contact with Rey. Now that the moment had been so thoroughly shattered, she was wondering exactly what was going on in Rey's mind. Even if she wanted to, she couldn't probe her to find out. The shield she had set up impeded any attempt for anyone to break into her mind.

She knew. She'd tested it, and was happy to learn that Rey wouldn't have anyone reading her mind without her consent. She couldn't even sense the feelings rolling off of Rey like she normally could. That left her oblivious to why Rey had kissed her. She hoped it was because she felt the same way, but there was an equal possibility it had been out of gratitude.

"Hey... Rey?" she asked, embarrassed that her words came out as strained as they did.

Rey turned around to look at Aliana, her annoyed expression softening greatly. "Oh, I'm sorry about that Alie," she said gently, moving to sit beside the Sith once more. "Master Skywalker can have terrible timing." She sighed and pulled Aliana into a warm embrace.

Aliana wanted to melt into the embrace, to just enjoy being so close to the woman she loved. She wanted so desperately to enjoy what might be just a fleeting moment before returning to whatever their 'normal' was, but she put her hands on Rey's shoulders and shook her head.

"Wait..." she said, looking afraid of what she was about to hear, "Rey... what is this?"

Rey blinked, surprised by the question. She had thought the kiss would have made it obvious, but it seemed as though Aliana wasn't sure. Perhaps she wanted to make sure there wasn't any misunderstanding. Rey felt a soft smile on her lips, marveling at how thoughtful Aliana continued to be before she spoke.

"I sort of acted without thinking," she admitted bashfully. "But I don't regret it. What you did for me just now, it made me realize how wonderful you've been to me. How wonderful you are. I tried to keep my distance and remain objective about you, but I can't. You mean too much to me. You've been closer to me than anyone has ever been. I don't want to keep you away any longer, and I'm just now starting to realize what that means."

She cupped Aliana's cheek in one hand as she met her beautiful crimson gaze with her own. "...I love you, Aliana," she said gently.

Aliana's worried face broke into a smile, "R-really?"

Rey nodded, "Really. I... want to be with you, if you'll let me."

Aliana couldn't believe what she was hearing. Rey loved her. She wanted to be with her. It was what she'd been dreaming about for the last few months, and now it was really happening.

“Of course I will,” she whispered, squeezing Rey’s hand and resting her forehead against hers, “I want that too...”

Rey let out a gentle chuckle she held Aliana closer to her. All the while, fresh new tears slipped through her closed eyes and streamed down her cheeks. These were not tears of despair, however. They were tears of relief, happiness and fulfillment. This felt right. At long last, Rey felt like she belonged somewhere. “Thank you,” she whispered.

Aliana couldn’t contain herself anymore and leaned forward to kiss her again. Rey’s earthy scent hit her nose and made her feel so relaxed that she swore she could have just fallen asleep in her arms like that.

Rey acted as though she were reading Aliana’s mind, as she shifted her weight to ease the both of them down so that they were laying on the flat smooth surface of the huts resting place. Rey grabbed a plush cloth to rest her head upon as she positioned Aliana so that she could rest her head on her chest. “Comfortable?” she asked. “I know you must be tired.”

“I’m exhausted, but it was worth it. Getting that grease stain out of your head alone would have made it worth it, but this... I can’t even begin to describe how happy I am right now,” Aliana squealed, kissing Rey’s cheek, “I’m almost afraid if I go to sleep, I’ll wake up and realize it was a dream.”

Rey couldn’t help but smile. She could hardly believe that Aliana was truly this adorable. “I’ll be here when you wake up,” she cooed softly before planting a kiss on the top of Aliana’s head. “I promise.”

Aliana smiled, but tried to push herself off of Rey anyway, “Still... I’d rather sleep on the Fury. Not within a hundred yards of an old Jedi.”

Aliana stretched happily as she came out of her quarters to the main holoterminal beeping. She sat down on the couch and activated the holoterminal pleased to see Poe Dameron looking back at her.

“Did I wake you, Lord Amorosa?” he asked.

“Yeah, but I’m in a good mood. So I won’t choke you,” Aliana snickered, “What’s up, Captain?”

“Just thought you might want to know that someone else just woke up!” Poe said before stepping to the side. As he did, Finn stepped into view, fully conscious and on his feet.

“Finn!” Aliana exclaimed with glee. “How are you feeling?”

“I’ve felt better but I’m alive so I can’t complain,” Finn responded, rolling a shoulder slightly. “Listen it’s good to see you too, but I need to ask about Rey. She’s with you, right? Is she ok?”

“Yeah, she is, one second,” Aliana stood up and looked at the door to Rey’s quarters, “Rey! Come out here! Finn’s on the holoterminal!”

Aliana heard some fumbling from her quarters before Rey slid out the door, her bare feet finding little traction on the metal floor. As quickly as she could, she rushed over to the holo terminal, nearly crashing into Aliana as she reached them.

“FINN!” Rey yelled with a wide smile on her face. “You’re ok!”

“Better now that you’re here,” Finn said with a smile. “What about you guys?”

Rey turned to look at Aliana, her expression warm and affectionate. “Oh we are doing fantastic.”

“Everything’s okay? Skywalker not giving you any more trouble?” Poe asked.

“A little, but nothing I can’t handle,” Aliana smiled.

“Poe told me what Leia said to you,” Finn winced, “Kriff that was horrible.”

“Yeah, it wasn’t fun to hear,” Aliana said wincing slightly. “But I’ll be ok. Thanks Finn.

“Hey, we’re all here for you,” Finn said with a reassuring smile. “You’re just as much a part of this as anyone. No matter what the General says.

“Well I’ll be sure to get her back for it when I tell her the good news,” Aliana replied, smirking at Rey.

“What good news?” Poe asked, arching a brow.

Rey and Aliana looked at each other and smiled before they leaned in and briefly kissed. When they pulled away, they saw Poe’s eyes widened and Finn looking really smug.

“Oh the general is going to FLIP!” Poe said, covering his mouth as he started laughing, “The Admirals are already watching for her attitude shifts whenever anyone mentions Amorosa’s name, but when this news reaches her it’s gonna be like Life Day on Tatooine.”

“I’m so happy to see that things are better between you two,” Finn smiled.

“Thanks, Finn,” Rey said, wrapping her arms around Aliana. “I’m happy to see you doing better.”

“Well enough to try my luck at round two with Kylo Ren,” Finn said, a look of determination clear through the filter of the holo.

“Easy there, soldier,” Poe said placing a hand on Finn’s shoulder. “Let’s make sure you’re back to 100% before we send you after another Dark Jedi.”

“And you’ll need a new lightsaber if you’re going to try that kind of stunt,” Aliana smiled, but then her face lit up with an idea, “Actually... I’m working on a set of stock lightsabers, would you like me to build you one?”

Finn's eyes went wide. “You can do that? Oh absolutely!” he said with a wide grin.

“Wait a minute. You said that Finn here is Force Sensitive right?” Poe asked.

“Indeed he is,” Aliana confirmed.

“So does that mean we should send him your guy’s way?” Poe continued.

“And have to deal with the decrepit recluse that is Luke Skywalker?” Aliana grimaced. “Hell no. Once Rey completes her training here, we’ll come back to relay all those teachings to you. All the

knowledge with none of the old man smells.”

“Sounds good,” Poe nodded, “When do you expect to be back?”

“Assuming we don’t get a distress call? Another month at the most,” Rey nodded, “I’ve learned most of the basics, and all that’s really left is to finish my lightsaber training. And to build my lightsaber.”

“We hope to have you back sooner rather than later,” Poe smiled, “And please, let me know when you break the news to General Organa. I can’t miss that.”

“Will do Poe, thank you.”

Chapter End Notes

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You Won't Be Alone Anymore

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Aliana couldn't be happier. She was practically skipping around her ship. While it had only been a week since Rey had confessed her feelings to her, that week was one of the most blissfully delightful weeks of her life. She couldn't remember feeling this good and this energized. She'd finished the lightsaber she'd been working on and had already begun work on Finn's, selecting a silver crystal for the blade. Her own training, as she always liked to keep in top shape and practice, had become a lot easier to go through each and every day even when adding Rey's lightsaber training on top of it.

She just felt like nothing could possibly slow her down.

She was practically humming as she slid Rey's breakfast, a small meal to avoid getting pains while she was training, across the table to her and sat down with her own.

Rey meanwhile could barely keep her eyes off of Aliana even as they were eating. Ever since she confessed, she felt as though a painful weight had been lifted from her shoulders. The level of euphoria it offered her was warming and soothing while at the same time exhilarating. She was fairly sure she was cheating at her Jedi training as she felt sheer unbridled passion fueling her body non stop since that fateful night. Something that she felt might have been at least somewhat frowned upon by the Jedi of old. Of course when she needed to center herself even thinking about Aliana was able to soothe her and cleanse her minds of worries.

The Sith before her was captivating in every sense of the word, even with a bit of her breakfast hanging on her lips.

Aliana looked up and smiled as she reached forward and squeezed Rey's fingers, "Got something on your mind? You've been burning a hole in my forehead since I sat down."

"Probably because I can't bring myself to look away," Rey said with an easy smile. "By the Force, you are too perfect. How can it be legal?"

Aliana's eyes widened and her cheeks flushed a dark red, "I... don't know?" she said, twirling her hair nervously, "Where'd that come from?"

"I think it's one of the thoughts I've tried to keep buried for the past few months," Rey admitted with a shrug. "A week has passed and I still couldn't feel happier than I do with you right now," she said, squeezing Aliana's hand in her own. "Also, it's incredibly adorable when you do that with your hair."

Aliana blushed deeper and dropped her finger from her hair, "I... I didn't know you thought that highly of me," she smiled, sliding closer to her.

"That's because I was too busy being stupid and distant," she said softly, leaning forward to kiss Aliana's freckled cheek. "So now I have to tell you these things now."

Aliana's smile only widened as she pulled Rey closer and hugged her tightly, kissing her cheek and relishing in how good it felt to hold the Jedi in her arms, "I love you..."

"I love you too, Alie," Rey, gently raking her fingers over Aliana's thick curly hair. "I've never been this happy before in my life." Rey pulled away slightly so she could look into Aliana's beautiful crimson eyes. "To think that this all started from a business transaction."

"You're never know when or how you're going to meet the people who mean the most to you," Aliana smiled as she kissed Rey's forehead, "Can I tell you something kinda embarrassing?"

"Always," Rey said casually. "At this point, I don't think there's anything that you can't tell me."

"When I made the offer of dinner, I had actually only intended to take you to bed with me," Aliana explained, "But as we started talking, I just found myself liking you so much that I couldn't bring myself to actually try. When you left I was hoping I'd get to see you again before I left."

"Aww," Rey said, feeling oddly touched. "You were interested in me from the start. I knew it!" she cheered, leaning forward for an affectionate kiss. "I... guess it's fair to assume I didn't feel the same at the time. I still hadn't considered women to be viable of course."

"Interested? When I first laid eyes on you, I thought you were gorgeous," Aliana said sheepishly, "Like I said before, I get nervous around pretty girls and trying to keep things casual when I was making my proposition was the hardest thing I've ever done."

"You certainly are adorable when you're flustered," Rey teased, brushing a curly strand of hair behind Aliana's ear. "I definitely see that now."

An agreeable chirp was suddenly heard from the table as Rey turned around slightly to see the Porg on the table, taking a bite of her breakfast. "Oh well, just help yourself, why don't you?" she chided slightly with a smile.

Aliana giggled as she watched the Porg swallow a piece of veg-meat whole and hop off the table, "He eats like a black hole in an asteroid field," she said as she kissed Rey's cheek again, "Oh by the way, I have something for you," she smiled as she stood up.

"Oh, second helpings?" Rey guessed. "I thought we were eating light this morning."

The Porg squeaked, tilting his head.

"Oh you're hardly one to talk," Rey teased. "Besides, if you grew up on a desert planet, having to scavenge to live, you'd have a large appetite too."

"Well you're welcome to as many leftovers as you want after training. They're in the powered duracrate beside the crystal cabinet," Aliana said as she disappeared into the cargo hold. She came out a few minutes later holding something wrapped in cloth, "But no, this is what I have for you."

She sat down in front of Rey and handed her the bundle. Rey took it and unwrapped it, and her eyes widened. Inside was a shining, silver lightsaber that on the surface looked like it had been made out of something other than durasteel. It was crafted like some sort of elegant decoration with a sleek and polished design.

“I know you wanted to build a saberstaff, but I still wanted to make you something,” Aliana said, “It’s a Sith tradition for a teacher to build a lightsaber for their apprentice, and I’ve been teaching you lightsaber combat so... it’s mostly symbolic really, I don’t expect it to be your permanent weapon. But I hope you like it.”

Rey looked at the weapon with a certain glint in her eyes. She felt a rush of emotions rise within her as a wide smile. Cautiously, she took the saber in her hands before rising to her feet and distancing herself from the table. Once she had more space, she ignited the silver hilt, causing a solid beam of crimson light to shoot out before her. The energy was so focused she couldn’t see any crackling or shimmering like with Kylo Ren’s lightsaber.

“It’s... Wonderful,” she said her enraptured gaze turning back to Aliana. “I love it!”

Aliana smiled, happy that her plan had actually worked out and that Rey appreciated the weapon, “I’m glad. I’ve been working on it for a few months. Polishing the durasteel was a pain, but it was worth it once the whole thing came together.”

Rey sheathed the weapon, clipping it to her belt before walking over to Aliana and pulling her into a hug. “You’re amazing,” she said softly as she buried her face in the Sith’s hair. “...I hope you don’t take offense to this, but I do still intend on making my own lightsaber at some point anyway,” she added cautiously. “I will still keep this one, though.”

“I know, I figured that when I was building it,” Aliana nodded, “I just... wanted you to have it anyway.”

“Thank you, Alie,” Rey cooed softly before cupping Aliana’s cheeks and kissing her. “I’ll be sure to use it around Leia if I can. That will get under her skin,” she added with a mischievous grin.

“Oh I love you,” Aliana grinned, lifting Rey by the hips and pressing her back against the wall as she kissed her deeply, holding her by the waist.

Rey let out a surprised yelp before melting into the kiss. A delighted noise tickled her throat as she accepted Aliana’s tongue in her mouth and she reached up to slide her fingers through the Sith’s hair. The half finished breakfast would have laid forgotten on the table were it not for their fair feathered friend.

“Rey!” Luke yelled.

Rey snapped out of her trance as she looked at Luke, confusion written across her face, “Wha?”

“You were slipping into the Dark Side again,” Luke frowned, pacing a circle around her, “It’s been rolling off of you all week.”

“Has it?” Rey asked, tilting her head. “I don’t feel cold, really.” An interesting note, she thought, as when she first came to Ahch To, she could barely walk anywhere without one of Aliana’s cloaks. Jump to the present and she was wearing her sleeveless tunic and vest and feeling fine.

“There is this thick aura of the Dark Side surrounding you at all times,” Luke explained, “Whenever you walk into a room, the Dark Side grows stronger. You’ve been tapping into it so much that you don’t even recognize it, do you?”

Her brow furrowed in concern, but then she took a moment to reflect. So, she was using the dark side without realizing it. How did she feel? ... Content, satisfied, like she could do anything. At the same time she didn't feel especially power hungry. Ambitious, yes, but not ambitious to the detriment of anyone else. She still felt very much like herself, just a very happy version of herself.

She was using the darkness, not surrendering to it.

"Well I apologize if this upsets you, Master Skywalker," Rey said with a modicum on sincerity. "But if it's any consolation, I do feel relatively fine."

"Rey, don't you realize what kind of fire you're playing with here?" Luke asked, sitting down in front of her, "The Dark Side is a slow poison. It will be patient and lure you in at whatever pace it needs to. Snoke manipulated my apprentice for two decades before Ben finally turned, who's to say it won't happen to you?"

"That's why I'm training with both you and Alie," Rey explained almost casually. "She told me the Dark Side does it's worst when you surrender to it, but if you learn to control it, you ward off it's corruption."

Rey smiled and leaned forward to place a hand on Luke's shoulder. "Kylo Ren failed you because he surrendered to the Darkness. I won't do that. Promise."

"Every Jedi who fell thought they were strong enough to control the darkness, Rey," Luke said warily, "Don't let the Sith encourage that kind of arrogance."

Rey held a hand up and nodded at Luke. "Alright. How about I try to focus on the Light this time when I meditate? Will that help ease your mind?"

Luke frowned but voiced no objection.

"Alright," Rey said cheerfully before assuming her original position. She took a deep breath and reached out with her senses. She sensed the energy surrounding the island. Her mind focused solely on the energy. Her thoughts, her feelings, her questions, all of them were banished as she sharpened her concentration. There was balance. Serenity. Peace.

Yet she also sensed something else. Regret. Fear. Guilt. It was a strange feeling to get as she tried to focus on being at peace, but it grew stronger the further she slipped into her trance. The less and less she channeled the Dark Side, the more it started to seep around her and disturb her meditations. She twitched and tried to push it away, but it refused to relent.

She followed it's trail out of curiosity and found it led all the way back to Luke. She opened her eyes and looked at him curiously.

"Master Skywalker, there's a darkness surrounding *you*," she said quietly, "Is everything alright?"

Luke's eyes widened in shock and growing horror. He inwardly cursed his recent decision to reconnect himself to the Force. He then sighed and slumped over on the stone from where he sat.

"...Yes, I imagine the darkness would be surrounding me after what I had done," Luke said solemnly.

"What did you do?" Rey asked.

"...Ben ran to Snoke because of me."

Rey blinked. That got her attention.

"I noticed the darkness in Ben during his training. I saw it twisting him into something cruel and hateful. One night, I peered into his mind to see how deep it was. What I felt terrified me to the core. I was there. I had the power to stop him from becoming the monster I knew he would become and then in one moment of weakness, I drew myself to act." Luke winced as he recalled the memory. "It was fleeting, as gone as soon as it came and all I felt was shame. And then I saw Ben looking up. At a master who had failed him."

Luke hung his head low, falling silent after that.

"Huh..." Rey said nonchalantly.

Luke looked up, looking confused, "Excuse me?"

"Oh, I said 'Huh'," Rey said, looking at him curiously.

"You seem to be rather calm about all of this," Luke raised an eyebrow.

"Well maybe I'd be more disappointed in you if Kylo Ren hadn't tried to kill me, broke into my mind, and spent months forcing himself into my presence to talk about how he was going to kill my girlfriend and take possession of me," Rey shrugged, "Frankly I just have no sympathy for him."

"But Rey, it's my fault he became this way," Luke argued, "If I hadn't-"

"Kylo Ren was a self-entitled narcissist long before he joined the First Order," Rey said, standing up and turning away from him, "You didn't make him that way, all you did was give him an excuse to jump."

Luke looked at Rey, utterly baffled by her take away from his shameful confession.

"With all due respect, Master, and this may very well be the Dark Side in me talking, I think the only mistake you made that night was not following through." Rey's eyes widened as a thought crossed her mind and she turned her head towards the direction of the Fury. "I think I remember reading a holocron with a story much like this. Hang on. I'll go get it," Rey lied, rising from the stone floor and making her way out of the temple.

She didn't wait for him to respond as she took off into a run. She'd lied, of course. There was no story. There was just something about how Luke had called Kylo Ren his apprentice that had stood out to her. The last time she'd seen him, Kylo Ren had mentioned leaving a scar on Aliana that would haunt her for the rest of her life. And just a few months ago before they'd landed on Takodana, Aliana had shown her a lightsaber scar she'd suffered when her mother was attacked. It was too much of a coincidence, she thought as she leapt down a cliff and skipping fifteen minutes of walking as she tore off toward the Fury. She was only becoming angrier and more distraught over the implication that wouldn't stop rattling around her brain.

It couldn't have been... could it?

She passed by Aliana, who was building a fire pit outside the ship and hastily greeted her as she ran inside. She wanted to ask Alie herself, but she didn't want to risk causing her undue pain. No, this

time she would have to do this covertly.

“2V?” Rey called out as she closed the door behind her.

2V walked out of the engine room and walked towards Rey. “Hello there, Miss Rey. How may I be of assistance?”

“I need to know who attacked Darth Mayrik and Alie,” Rey said adamantly.

“Miss Rey, I’m required to remind you that-”

“I know, tell me anyway,” Rey said, glaring at the droid.

“Very well, Miss Rey,” 2V replied, “Darth Mayrik and Darth Amorosa were attacked by Jedi Master Luke Skywalker and Jedi Padawan Benjamin Solo.”

The color drained from Rey’s face. Her body was trembling to the point where she leaned against the wall to support herself. Her breathing became heavy as the urge to vomit started to grow. She could barely think about anything other than how absolutely angry she was. A part of her wanted to rush back out the door and charge at Skywalker, lightsaber drawn. The one thing that stopped her was the fact that her immeasurable disgust made it nearly impossible to stay on her feet.

She didn’t know what to do.

“Miss Rey?” 2V asked, worried. “Are you alright? Do you need to lie down?”

“No, I just... why didn’t she tell me?” Rey asked quietly, “She could have told me long before we came here...”

“It is my understanding that Miss Alie believed you would not care, and would accuse her of lying to smear the Jedi,” 2V explained.

Another wave of nausea surged through Rey as she heard 2V’s words. She wasn’t sure if she was disgusted by that rationale alone, or the fact that she wasn’t sure if she would have truly accused her of such a thing.

“Miss Rey, you really do not look well right now,” 2V said with worry.

“I’m not well,” Rey shook her head, “Why did she come here if Luke was the one who killed her mother?”

“I’m not sure, Miss Rey. She never left that information in my databanks,” 2V shook his head.

Rey thought back to all the moments where Aliana had to be in proximity to Luke. Her mother’s killer. She was the one who convinced him to take her as his apprentice! She tolerated his presence for months! How!? She could have enacted her revenge on him a thousand times over by now, and at this point, Rey wouldn’t have blamed her. Did she truly do this because she loved her?

She grabbed both sides of her head and squeezed tightly. She tried to focus on anything but the horrible truth she had just uncovered to no avail. Rey’s legs shook until she fell to her knees promoting her hands to hit the metal floor hard.

“DAMMIT!” she shouted hoarsely.

“Miss Rey!” 2V said, rushing forward and helping Rey to her feet, holding her steady, “I wonder if this was why Miss Alie wouldn’t tell you. Perhaps she believed it would disrupt your equilibrium.”

Rey shook her head and detached herself from 2V. She wobbled over to the cockpit and looked out the window at Aliana who was stacking firewood in a tripod fashion, and then back at the hill where Luke was slowly coming down toward the Fury. She watched as Luke approached and tapped her shoulder, and Aliana practically jumped a mile out of her skin and drew her lightsaber before yelling at him. She couldn’t hear what she was yelling, but it must have been quite colorful as Luke looked like someone had shot an akk dog in front of him.

Rey pushed the debilitating disgust deep down. Instead she focused on her anger. She focused on the fear and pain Aliana was forced to endure because of Luke, and how the Jedi master didn’t even remember the face of the child he had traumatized for life. She focused on the injustice of Luke’s dismissal and scorn towards Aliana after all he had done to her. She harnessed that anger, using to fuel every step as she stormed out of the cockpit, making her way to the airlock.

As she stormed out of the ship, she could finally catch the tail end of what Aliana and Luke were talking about.

“...and immersed more in the Dark Side than she is in the Light.”

“That’s her prerogative, Skywalker. I gave her the information she needed to make her decision, and she’s making it,” Aliana bit back, clearly tired of constantly having this conversation, “If Rey chooses to embrace the Dark Side, there’s nothing you or I can do about it. Complaining to me is a waste of your time, complain to her if you think it’s so important.”

“She wouldn’t be in this position if you weren’t influencing her,” Luke argued.

“You might be right, but I can’t just un-meet her, and I’m sure as hell not going to just fly off simply because you wanted me to,” Aliana glared him down. Her lightsaber was still active, but surprisingly she hadn’t taken so much as a swing at him, “I love her, and I’m not going anywhere. So I suggest you get used to it, because where she goes, I go!”

Luke appeared as though he were about to bite back before he saw Rey descend from the Fury’s ramp appearing absolutely livid at him. In spite of the fact that she appeared more furious towards him than he had ever seen, he regarded her with a dismissive tone.

“Couldn’t find the holocron?” he asked.

“The temple,” Rey said sharply. “Now!”

Aliana glanced at Rey, looking confused, “Sweetie, are you alright?” she asked as she reached out to grasp Rey’s shoulder.

Rey would be lying if she said Aliana’s touch wasn’t at least somewhat comforting. She suddenly felt the urge to hold her girlfriend as tight as she could, forever keeping between her and the Jedi that killed her mother.

That would have to wait, she reached to gently caress the hand that was holding her shoulder. “I just need to talk to him about something. I’ll be back soon.”

She reluctantly pulled away from Aliana and gestured for Luke to climb the stairs back to the temple. The Jedi looked confused as he followed her back up the mountain. When they had finally reached the temple, Rey took the chance to strike.

“Nine years ago, you and Kylo Ren killed a Sith Lord on Corellia,” Rey said, her hand on her lightsaber, “Is that true?”

Luke blinked, surprised by the question. “What? Where did this come from?”

“Answer the question!” Rey snapped.

Luke took a moment to think. “...Yes,” Luke said quietly as he recollected. “We received a tip that there was a place on Corellia that was touched with the Dark Side. As Ben and I went to investigate, we felt the Sith’s presence almost immediately. I had deduced they were conspiring with the Imperial remnant on the planet. I knew decisive action had to be taken. Ben and I engaged the Sith and destroyed the master. The apprentice hasn’t been seen si-” his words trailed off as the connections began to form in her brain. Slowly, he turned back to look at Rey, who was seething in anger.

“No...” he whispered.

“Alie told me about how two Jedi attacked her and Darth Mayrik on Corellia years ago,” Rey explained, glaring at Luke and clutching her lightsaber so hard her knuckles began to turn white, “You and Kylo Ren murdered a girl’s mother in front of her...”

Luke’s widened eyes then narrowed at Rey. “They were Si-”

“SHE WAS A CHILD!” Rey bellowed at Luke, her crimson blade stopping just shy of his throat, causing him to fall back against the stone wall. “You expressed greater guilt for nearly murdering your monster of a nephew than you have killing a woman in front of her daughter! Aliana lost the only family she had because of you and you don’t even care! You didn’t even recognize her!”

“I didn’t recognize her because I hadn’t given that fight a thought since it happened,” Luke argued, “There were Sith active, only two decades after they were believed to be gone. What was I supposed to do, nothing? Just let the Sith return to the galaxy uncontested? Let fear and tyranny take root again?”

“TALK TO THEM!” Rey screamed, barely holding back the impulse to swing her blade at them. “Broker for peace like any Jedi would! Give them a chance to explain themselves and not just charge at them with the intent to kill without a second thought!”

The temple around them began to quake as Rey continued to scorn the old Jedi. Cracks began to form in the ancient stone walls under the wake of the young woman’s anger.

“You said that it was the Jedi’s duty to face fear, but your murder of Darth Mayrik was an act made in nothing but fear! You killed Darth Mayrik because you were afraid, and you didn’t even care! Aliana was scarred for life that day all thanks to your apprentice and your own damned cowardice!”

Luke looked away from her as Rey’s words began to resonate with him. He had always held fast in his belief that the Sith should never return. That they would only ever bring destruction and death to the galaxy. And he continued in that belief, even as his apprentice fell to the Dark Side and

terrorized countless worlds while a Sith did everything she possibly could to impede and obstruct him. While he hid on some backwater planet in the middle of nowhere.

“You went to so much effort to turn Darth Vader back from the Dark Side. And you’ve spent so long blaming yourself for Kylo Ren’s fall,” Rey said, her disgust in the old Jedi having now reached its tipping point, “Do you really reserve your compassion only for the people you’re related to?”

Luke gave no answer. He had none. The gravity of his actions and inactions began to weigh heavier and heavier onto his consciousness. He had no words to convey. No excuse. No defense of any kind.

Rey simply sneered at his silence, deactivating her blade before turning her back to Luke. “You said that the galaxy doesn’t need the Jedi anymore, and now I see why. Because Jedi like YOU are just a blight on the galaxy,” she said, venom dripping from her every word. “But I won’t be like you. I’ll be the Jedi that the galaxy needs.” She didn’t even look back to see any start of a response from Luke before she began walking away.

As she vanished around the corner, Luke thought about what she’d said. He had spent so long trying to find a way to turn Ben from the Dark Side, and had nearly sent himself to his death trying to redeem his father. Yet, the moment he so much as laid eyes on another Sith, he’d jumped into the fight without a moment’s hesitation. Had he really been that biased toward his own family?

He stood up and made his way toward his hut, wondering if he would have exerted so much effort into trying to get through to Vader if he hadn’t told him he was his father. He’d said as much to Obi-Wan, that he was certain there was good in him. But... where had that come from? He hadn’t spared a thought for Vader beyond wanting to destroy him until that fateful moment on Bespin. After that, it was as if... everything was different.

He had been right, of course. There was enough good in Vader to make him betray the Emperor. But he never once stopped to see that there was good in the Sith building a fire just down the mountain, even though it had been made clear as day to him on so many occasions. The way Amorosa was so protective of Rey, had brought her straight to him to learn the ways of the Jedi, and was actively fighting with the Resistance.

A Sith who, despite having ample reason to seek revenge, had only ever raised her lightsaber against him in self-defense.

Luke sat down inside his hut, and stared at the small chest that held what he could salvage from the temple. He opened it and dug through the robes, long-dead datapads and crystals, until he found it. Sat at the bottom of the chest, wrapped in a cloth that was covered with dust. He’d thrown it in here years ago, and hadn’t so much as thought about it even as he was piling salvage on top of it. Pulling out the small bundle, he held it firmly in his hands and stared at it. As much as he understood now, he knew there was no way he could make up for depriving Amorosa of her mother’s guidance and leaving her adrift in the galaxy.

But he still should return this anyway.

Rey came storming down the mountain to a much more worried looking Aliana.

“Sweetheart, what’s got you so angry?” the Sith asked as she approached her, laying a hand on her girlfriend’s shoulder.

Rey tried to steady her breathing as Aliana came into sight and placed her hand on her. She didn’t want to be this angry around the woman she loved, not even if she was angry on her behalf. She felt the warmth of Aliana’s love soothe her rage, yet in place of that anger came sorrow. Sadness for the other woman who had been robbed of her only family by an indifferent Jedi Master. How she spent years alone and aimless in the galaxy with nothing and no one to call home at the end of the day. How she may very well have spent her entire life like that were it not for their chance meeting on Jakku. Her gaze softened as she met that of Aliana’s, glistening slightly in unshed tears.

“I... may have done something you won’t like?” Rey admitted, averting her eyes after that.

“...What do you mean?” Aliana asked, becoming increasingly more concerned.

“I confronted Skywalker about Darth Mayrik,” Rey confessed. “I know you didn’t want to tell me, but I started to notice the pattern and I just couldn’t stay quiet about it and after 2V confirmed it to me, I had to face him. I’m so sorry Aliana.”

She didn’t apologize for confronting Luke or discovering the truth without Aliana telling her. She apologized for the months she was forced to spend on this island with her mother’s killer. She apologized for every backhanded and loathsome remark Luke gave to Aliana. She apologized for the possibility that she might not have believed Aliana if she had told her this herself.

Aliana’s grip on Rey’s arms tightened and she looked down at her feet, “I... I didn’t want to tell you. Not while... things were still tense between us. And then when they weren’t... I guess I didn’t want to disrupt your training. You were making such good progress. I was going to tell you after we returned to the base.”

“Oh, Alie,” Rey said, her eyes beginning to water as she pulled Aliana into a tight hug. She gently rubbed the Sith’s back as she buried her head into the crook of her neck. “I can’t imagine how hard this must have been for you. You deserve so much better.” she muttered quietly against the cloth of Aliana’s robes.

“I... I have it,” Aliana said as her arms tightened around Rey’s waist. It was the first time that she’d really stopped to consider just how much taller than her the Jedi was. Her head fit perfectly under her chin, “You’re here... you’re talking to me again... you love me.”

“I love you so much,” Rey confirmed, tilting her head down slightly to kiss Aliana’s cheek. “You won’t be alone anymore. Never again. I swear,” she muttered. She pulled away slightly to look at Aliana again. Her beautiful, dark skin so flawlessly dusted with freckles. Her hypnotically pretty crimson eyes. Her wild, gorgeous hair. She was stunning. At that moment, Rey could only ask herself, *‘How could the galaxy be so unbelievably cruel to someone so impossibly beautiful and kind?’*

“I love you too,” Aliana whispered, wiping her eyes and looking up at the woman who had come to mean more to her than anything in such a short time, “I don’t know what I’d be doing if I hadn’t met you. As stressful as things have been, as much as these last few months have been exhausting and dredged up so many painful memories... I wouldn’t trade it for anything.” She squeezed Rey’s waist tightly and stared up into her beautiful brown eyes, “Even on this planet, with that Jedi never too far away... you make it all so easy to bear.”

"I just... I just wish I knew," Rey said, her hands trembling slightly on Aliana's shoulders. "I wish I had gotten over myself sooner and gave you the support you needed during all of this. I know you don't blame me, and I appreciate that. I just..." Rey trailed off, unsure how to put what she was feeling into words. "...I just hate thinking about all the misery you put yourself through for my sake." She pulled Aliana closer, resting her head on the other woman's shoulder again. "I can't thank you enough for all you've done for me."

"You don't have to thank me, Rey," Aliana whispered, kissing her cheek and holding tightly to her, "I did all of that because I love you."

Rey balled parts of Aliana's robes into her fists as she clung to her. "I love you too," she said softly. The two of them stood there for awhile, gently rocking back and forth in each others arms as Rey felt her anger and sadness begin to drift away completely. Aliana's presence was so calming even in the most harrowing experiences.

"Lord Amorosa?" Luke said quietly, "Could I have a word?"

Aliana groaned. It was late, and Rey had gone to bed hours ago. Aliana found herself unable to sleep, so she relit the fire and sat beside it while she'd tried to meditate. It had been a harrowing afternoon, as once she and Rey had broken apart they'd spent much of the rest of the day talking about everything they'd kept from each other. Rey had even spent a solid hour tracing the lightsaber scar running across her shoulder and loudly cursing Kylo Ren for having done it to her.

In truth, Aliana had been afraid of both of them for much of her teenage life. And while she was still terrified of Skywalker, the revelation that Kylo Ren had been the same Jedi that had wounded her on Corellia made all her fear toward him vanish. The knowledge of just how thoroughly she had eclipsed him in skill and raw power was comforting. She took greater satisfaction than she had before in the outcome of their previous encounters.

She was powerful. And it felt good.

As she turned to the Jedi, her hand rested once again on her lightsaber, "What is it, Jedi?"

Luke was silent for a beat, exhaling solemnly before meeting Aliana's daring eyes. He didn't try to take a step closer to her than he already was. Not yet, at least.

"I know what you must think of me," Luke began. "And thanks to Rey, I now know why. ... I'll confess I didn't recognize you when you first arrived here. Nor had I given that day on Corellia with you and your mother a passing thought since. I..." Luke swallowed the lump in his throat before he continued. "I took something from you that day. Something important. I could not possibly begin to make up for what you lost when your mother died. I know no apology I could give would be enough. ...At the same time, I knew that I couldn't just do nothing. Not after everything you've done for Rey, and for the Resistance. I knew there had to be something I could do," as he said that, he pulled out the small bundle from within his robes, handing it over to her. "...So I'm giving this back to you."

Aliana looked at him suspiciously as she reached out and levitated the bundle from his hands, bringing it to her with the Force. She kept one eye on him as she untied the wraps and opened the cloth.

And then her eyes widened as she stumbled back, and let out a very small, strained gasp of shock.

Inside was a plain, unassuming lightsaber. The hilt was wrapped almost entirely in a stitched, leather grip and a braided string trailing off the belt hook. Aside from the impressive hand-stitching on the wraps, it was extremely modest in design. Aliana almost couldn't believe it, and gently lifted the weapon out of the cloth as if it were made of glass and switched it on. Her eyes started to well up in tears as a familiar-looking magenta blade burst forth from the emitter with a comforting screech. It had been so long since she'd seen it, and it still felt like only yesterday that she'd last held it.

She deactivated her mother's lightsaber and held it close to her chest, the tears now starting to fall freely from her face as she sat down on the log they'd been using for a seat around the fire. Tears of grief as she was once again brought back to that day so many years ago, fleeing from the Jedi in a shuttle and looking back as they disposed of her mother's body the only way Jedi ever knew how.

Since that day, she had no scrap of her mother left on the ship. She'd left no recordings, no journals, no holocrons, not even a holo-image. All she'd ever had were her memories. And being Sith, there was almost zero chance of ever getting to see her ghost.

And now she was holding her lightsaber. The one thing her mother had always kept with her, and now the only thing left in the galaxy that had ever belonged to her.

The hand holding the weapon was trembling hard. Aliana looked as though she could drop it with how shaken to the core she was. Even so, she held onto the lightsaber as tightly as she could. This was all she had left of her mother. She was not going to let it go.

Her eyes looked back up from the weapon and over to Skywalker, the old man giving her an almost warm look. She was at a loss for words. Even though being alone with Skywalker always terrified her, she always had a witty retort or a sharp threat always ready on her tongue. This was the first time she truly didn't know what to say to him. "I..."

Luke held up a hand. "You don't need to say anything," he said, "And you certainly don't need to thank me."

Aliana felt silent once more. She resigned to simply looking at the leather clad lightsaber in her hand.

"Her passions ran deep. As do yours," Luke noted to Aliana. "It was her love for you that saved you on Corellia."

"I never doubted that," Aliana responded, the steel returning to her eyes as she looked back up at Luke.

Luke nodded. "Of course."

Aliana glanced down her mother's lightsaber, and then turned a suspicious glare up to Luke, "Why? Why did you give this back? Why are you apologizing to me? You and your sister have done nothing but throw scorn on me since I arrived. So why are you doing this?"

"...Because I know I was wrong," Luke said, regret heavy on his face. "Ever since you two arrived, you've been challenging my beliefs about how the Force works and what I felt needed to be done. I resented every retort and dejection you made and now I know why. Because you were right." Luke walked over to sit on the log by the fireplace before he continued. "In my life, I have made a great deal of failings, yet I only ever learned the wrong lessons from them. I told myself that Darth

Mayrik was up to something vile on Corellia because it was easier than admitting that I was just afraid of the Dark Side. I told myself hiding away to let the Jedi die out was what needed to happen because... I was tired,” he said, shame deeply saturated in his voice. “Tired of fighting, tired of trying to piece something of the Jedi Order back together only for it to just keep falling apart. As much as I tried to convince myself otherwise, I was just tired of the struggle. I lost my will to fight. That was also my failing.”

His gaze, weary and humbled, fixed on Aliana once more. “You and Rey still haven’t lost that spark. That will to say no to tyranny and evil. I envy that in you most of all. The fact that a Sith has done more to stop the First Order than the Jedi says more in your favor than it does for mine.”

Aliana looked down at the fire, and clutched her mother’s lightsaber even tighter, “I thought about leaving. Just giving up and taking off somewhere, never to be seen again. After Leia openly wished that Rey would kill me, I started to seriously wonder what I was even doing wasting my time with the Resistance. Everything I did was met with derision and suspicion. If it weren’t for Rey... I may have just wandered off anyway. Go back to mercenary work in the Outer Rim.”

“So it was a chance meeting on Jakku that made you a Resistance fighter,” Luke noted, a small smile growing over his bearded face. “I guess the Force does work in mysterious-”

“Don’t you start!” Aliana hissed. “You don’t get to be cheeky with me!”

Luke’s smile vanished as he nodded. “Right. Sorry.”

“If I hadn’t come here, Leia might have just sent me on my way anyway,” Aliana shook her head, “I’m dreading going back to D’Qar. I have friends there, but there I’ll be subject to Leia’s commands. And when she finds out about me and Rey, she’s going to blow a gasket. She already thinks that I’m the one turning her off the Jedi path. She can’t fathom the idea that maybe she just made that decision herself.”

Aliana didn’t know why she was sharing this with him. Maybe just an excuse to vent. Either way, she kept her eyes firmly locked to the fire.

“I don’t envy you for that,” Luke replied. “My sister is perhaps the single most stubborn person that I know. Especially when Sith are involved,” His gaze turned to the fire as his thoughts turned to Leia. “The Empire took everything from her. Her home, her family, almost everyone under her command. After Alderaan, she would take every chance she could to kill Darth Vader, and everytime all of those soldiers would perish. She told herself that the chance to avenge Alderaan was worth the risk, but it soon became an attrition rate the rebellion couldn’t afford. Her hatred of the Sith got even worse after the war. When it was revealed that Vader was our father she lost a great deal of her influence in the New Republic. Even after death Vader was still causing her grief.”

An unfortunate memory came to the forefront of Luke’s mind causing him to grimace. “Our father’s spirit came to her one day, asking for her forgiveness. She denounced her ties to him and commanded he leave her alone forever. I could understand of course, he took more from her than he did from me,” Luke glanced at his mechanical hand as he said that. “Even still, her intense hatred of anything to do with the Sith only grew and festered. And now, you are facing the brunt of that hatred even when you don’t deserve it.”

“...So what am I supposed to do? I can’t erase Vader from her memory,” Aliana said, running her finger over the stitches on her mother’s lightsaber, “And I can’t spend the entire war looking over my shoulder expecting a lightsaber in the back.”

“If it makes you feel any better, she doesn’t have her lightsaber anymore,” Luke said. “She never technically finished her training. On the last night she told me that she received a vision. Said her son would die at the end of her Jedi path so she gave it up.”

Luke propped his hands on his knees as he eased himself back to his feet. “As for what to do, I would advise you to do the same thing you did with me. Give her the harsh truth. Tell her that she only hates you for what Vader did to her. She will get furious, of that I have no doubt, but she will have no recourse because she will know you’re right. Reprimanding others for telling the truth has been the one line she refuses to cross so far.”

Aliana quietly wondered if that would work. It was equally likely that Leia would simply have her exiled from D’Qar. Frankly, he couldn’t trust any positive appraisal of Leia. Poe was insistent that Leia’s behavior with her was an aberration, but all she had ever seen of Leia was distrust and hostility.

She shook her head and stood up, “Maybe. For now I’m going back inside,” she said as she turned around and headed back toward the Fury. As she climbed the ramp, she turned back to Luke, who had already started heading back up the mountain, “And... thank you, Skywalker.”

She didn’t wait for a response and shut the Fury’s airlock behind her. She hadn’t forgiven him for killing her mother. She would never forgive him. And one day she would return to this place to collect the blood she was owed. A small token like this wasn’t enough to make up for the childhood that was stolen from her.

But holding her mother’s lightsaber did bring her some measure of peace.

Chapter End Notes

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Alie's Inclusion Is Not Negotiable

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Rey and Aliana jolted up from the couch as the holoterminal started beeping incessantly and a red-tinted glow was covering the projectors. Aliana's pupils shrunk. This was a bad sign. Holoterminals only had this tint and this kind of incessant noise when it was an emergency transmission. Someone was in trouble.

"What is that?" Rey asked, having never seen the holoterminal in this state before.

"Distress call," Aliana said, pushing Rey off of her and hitting the switch, "Poe? Is that you?"

"This a bad time?" Poe asked as he seemed to be busy with something just out of sight.

"Uh..." Rey and Aliana looked at each other.

"We were just making out, what do you want?" Aliana asked, sitting forward and looking concerned about how anxious he looked, "Is everything alright?"

"Not really," Poe responded as he threw something behind him, "Recon teams have spotted the First Order on their way to D'Qar. They've found us, and we need to abandon this base fast."

"What about the Republic?" Aliana asked, "Can't they send aid?"

"Republic's been tied up with assaults on all major fronts from the Unknown Regions," Poe said as he continued fumbling with something just out of the frame, "They can't spare any ships."

Rey's eyes widened with shock and concern. "Oh no! Don't worry Poe! We're on our way!"

"Not necessary," Poe said rather passively. "Good news is that given the average speed of a First Order assault fleet, we should have plenty of time to evacuate the base before they even show up. Just called to let you know to expect coordinates to the new base in a few days!"

"No way, we're coming right now!" Aliana insisted, "If the First Order shows up and you're still not out of there, you're going to be sitting ducks! We'll be there in eighteen hours!"

"Well I can't stop you from showing up, Poe said, hastily wrapping up his out of sight taske before turning to face the holo terminal. "I can guarantee you though, that we'll have the situation under control. Even if they show up earlier than expected we'll have an ace up our sleeve."

"You mean besides the Jedi and Sith insisting that they rush to your assistance?" Rey asked, arching a wary brow.

"We got some non-Force related tricks thank you very much," Poe said in faux indignance.

"Anyway, just hang tight and await new coordinates... or don't. It's your call."

"We'll be right there, Poe!"

The Fury dropped out of Hyperspace just in time. The Resistance cruisers were in orbit above D'Qar while transports occasionally flew up from the base. Meanwhile, several Star Destroyers and a Dreadnought were dropping out of Hyperspace at the exact time they had arrived.

"Oh this is not good," Aliana said as she tried to hail the Raddus, "Raddus! Raddus come in! This is Darth Amorosa!"

"This is the Raddus. Holdo speaking," came the familiar voice. "Wasn't expecting to hear from you before the rendezvous, Lord Amorosa. Is everything alright?"

"Is everything alright?" Rey parroted in disbelief. "The First Order is right on top of you!"

"An unfortunate reality, but not one we aren't prepared for," Holdo said. "We have Captain Dameron on the scene as we speak. I know he likes to fly solo, but I'm sure he'd appreciate the help."

"One fighter pilot?!" Aliana balked, looking at the comm speaker, "What exactly are you trying to do, Admiral?"

"Our biggest concern is the Dreadnought opening fire on the base before we finish our evacuation. Taking out its turbo lasers would solve that problem for us quite nicely," Holdo explained.

"And you're using one fighter to do that!?" Rey asked incredulously.

"Captain Dameron was insistent that one fighter is all we need... still, I'm sure one more wouldn't hurt. Lord Amorosa, I'm not familiar with your interceptor's specs? Is it capable of combat?"

"The Fury is a warship, Admiral," Aliana explained as she brought the Fury in to fly alongside Poe's fighter, "It could take out a cruiser on its own with a good enough pilot and gunner."

"Hey Amorosa!" came Poe's voice on the comm, "Good to see you! Think you can take the underside cannons while I blast the turbolasers?"

Aliana sat in the captain's chair whilst Rey assumed the secondary pilot seat. "I suspect that we can do our job faster than you," Aliana said, a hint of mischief in her voice. "Unless you and BB-8 feel like proving us wrong."

"Oh, Amorosa, you have yet to meet a man faster than me!" Poe retorted.

"No wonder you're 32 and still single," Aliana said, suppressing a snicker.

BB-8 let out a series of beeps that could only be described as 'Oh, snap!'

"Rey, bring us in to the underside of the ship toward those massive cannons," Aliana said as she turned to 2V, "2V, target with all weapons and prepare to launch them the moment you're in range."

"Of course, Alie," 2V said dutifully, priming the Fury's weapons and locking them on their targets. "It should delight you to know that the First Order hasn't seemed to detect us, yet."

"Perhaps they're distracted by the prospect of crushing the Resistance," Rey said, flying the Fury closer to the Dreadnought. "I remember you being pretty high on their hit list, Alie."

“The grease stain must not be with them,” Aliana laughed as the Fury dived under the dreadnought and toward the autocannons.

Above, Poe and BB-8 were weaving between turbolaser fire and blasting as many cannons off the surface of the dreadnought as they could. BB-8 beeped nervously as Poe made a sharp turn that almost skidded the dreadnought’s hull.

“Happy beeps here, buddy. C’mon, we’ve pulled crazier stunts than this,” Poe reassured him as he swung around another cannon.

As they continued to blast at the cannons, Poe caught several blips on his motion tracker. “Hey Amorosa, be careful!” He said warningly. “They just started to scramble their fighters!”

At that very moment a squadron of fighters began to descend onto his position, prompting him to veer hard right to his next target. Remaining quick, slippery and unpredictable, Poe’s flying ensured the pursuing fighters shot nothing but the hull of the Dreadnought.

“Fighters coming for us, Alie,” 2V remarked.

“I see them,” Aliana said, closing her eyes as she focused on the fighter pilots, “Keep weapons trained on the cannons, I’ll take care of the fighters.”

As the Fury made another pass at the cannons, Aliana used the Force to throw the TIE fighters off course to collide with one another and into the hull of the dreadnought. The Fury’s weapons tunnelled into the dreadnought’s cannons, causing structural damage but not harming the internal firing mechanisms.

“A direct hit, but the cannons are still operational,” Rey exclaimed.

Aliana frowned as they passed the damaged canon. Reaching out with her senses, she detected another squadron of ships coming around to intercept them on the other side of the Dreadnought.

“Rey veer left. We’re going for another pass at that cannon. 2V don’t fire on the cannon when we’re in range.”

2V turned around to look at Aliana with as much concern as his motionless face could muster. “Might I inquire what you plan to do, Alie?”

“Something unusual,” Aliana retorted.

With that said, the ship turned around to fly towards the cannon once more. The fighters swooped in and were quickly on top of them. Rey weaved the Fury to evade their fire as they approached the cannon. At Aliana’s command, 2V didn’t fire on the weapon. As they passed it, however, Aliana held her hand flat and lifted a single finger.

Suddenly, the entire squadron pursuing them lost control of their fighters and flew directly into the cannon.

“Direct hit,” 2V noted. “The canon is no longer operational. Well done, Alie!”

“That was quite a bit of set up just for showing off?” Rey noted with a smirk.

“Everything worth doing takes effort, love,” Aliana replied, “Now let’s get out of here.”

“Amorosa, wait!” came Poe’s voice on the comms, “We need to protect our bombing fleet. We have a chance to take down a dreadnought!”

“What?!” Aliana balked, “Poe, there’s cruisers all over the place, those bombers will be sitting ducks! Get back to the Raddus!”

“We have the advantage, Amorosa!” Poe stressed. “Just protect the bombers and we’ll be ok. We destroyed Starkiller base, we can destroy a Dreadnought!”

“Poe, I can’t stop an entire fleet from tearing those ships to shreds! Do not call out those bombers! Do you hear me!”

Poe gave no answer. The comm was cut off.

“Dammit! Rey get us to the bow of this thing! We need to save Poe from himself.

As the Fury flew out from beneath the Dreadnought, the three of them could see Poe’s X-wing beginning to turn around for another pass at the giant warship.

“This is Captain Dameron to Resistance Fleet I’m calling fo-” Poe’s words were cut short as he found himself unable to move a single muscle. He was completely frozen.”

“This is Darth Amorosa to the Resistance fleet, belay that order!” she said over the open channel. “The Dreadnoughts long range weapons are destroyed. We are clear to evacuate. BB-8 take the controls and fly the Captain to the Raddus!”

BB-8 happily obliged and turned the X wing back to the Resistance cruisers, flying alongside the Fury. As soon as both ships were docked into the hangar bay, the Raddus and surrounding ships jumped to lightspeed and sped out of the system.

Aliana and Rey stepped out of the Fury to the sound of cheering and whistling from the other pilots still docked in the hangar. Aliana jumped from the surprise, as she looked around to notice the entire Resistance fighter and bomber squadron staring directly at them.

“W-What is it? What did we do?” Aliana whispered to Rey.

Rey leaned over to whisper back to Aliana. “Ensured a safe evacuation and saved Poe... I think?” Rey offered. “If we did anything else, it’s news to me.”

Aliana had grown so used to the quiet of Ahch To that she had forgotten how much it unnerved her when the Resistance fighters treated her like a hero. She and Rey weaved around countless men and women as they made their way to the hangar door. They were stopped by a woman calling out to them as she exited a bomber.

“Wait! Lord Amorosa! Master Jedi!” she called out as she ran toward them, “If I could just have a moment?”

Aliana and Rey stopped just shy of the exit and turned to see the other woman rushing to them.

“Yes? Can we help you?” Rey asked, suddenly feeling that she had seemed this woman before.

“Yes, thank you. I’m Paige Tico,” the bomber introduced herself. “You probably don’t remember me. We technically met at the safehouse when you gave us Captain Dameron.”

“Oh right!” Aliana said, eyes brightening slightly in familiarity. “Good to see you. So what can we help you with?”

“I just wanted to thank you for reigning in Captain Dameron,” she said, reaching out to shake their hands, “I... I don’t know if we would have made it back alive if he’d called for a bombing run.”

“Oh... yeah, it’s nothing really,” Aliana smiled, shaking Paige’s hand, “I’ve met flyboys like Dameron before, it’s the same garbage every day with them.”

“I mean, he’s an excellent pilot, one of our best,” Paige said, feeling the need to be fair. “It’s just... ever since Starkiller base, his strategies have been getting more and more reckless.”

Rey shrugged. “It’s important to fight well and fight hard, but only if there are those alive to fight.”

“Where is Dameron, anyway?” Aliana asked, glancing around the hangar.

“He’s on the bridge being reprimanded for his reckless tactics,” Paige shook her head, “It’d probably be a lot worse for him if you hadn’t stepped in.”

“Well that’s good at least,” Rey said with a smile before turning to Aliana. “Shall we go up there to meet them? I imagine they’re expecting us by now.”

Aliana’s smile fell as she considered the inevitability of having to deal with Leia. Ever since that last week on Ahch To, the thought of any encounter with the Resistance General filled her with dread. Maybe it was just harder for her to keep up her rehearsed “Dark Lady” act now that she’d spent months letting all her vulnerabilities show, but regardless she was finding herself with less and less energy for Jedi nonsense than she’d had before Starkiller Base.

“I guess so,” she said, reaching out and squeezing Rey’s hand.

Rey took Aliana’s hand with glee, intertwining their fingers together as they stepped through the hangar doors.

Paige blinked, taking in the small but affectionate gesture that played out right in front of her.

“...Huh,” she said, cocking her head slightly.

As they made their way toward the bridge, Rey couldn’t help but notice the almost melancholy look on Aliana’s face. The way she seemed to stare at the floor a few feet ahead of her and didn’t make eye contact with anybody. She’d seen her upset, she’d seen her angry, but she’d never seen her look so... down before. She squeezed the Sith’s hand and pulled her closer as they continued toward the bow of the ship.

“Something the matter?” she asked.

Aliana remained quiet, seeming to not have heard her.

Rey frowned, unsatisfied with the lack of answer. Opting to get her attention, she stepped in front of Aliana, prompting her to stop. “Alie, talk to me,” she said gently but firmly. “What is bothering you?”

Aliana looked up in surprise, seemingly disoriented, “Hmm? Oh, uh... I don’t know? Leia I guess? Not looking forward to that...”

Rey’s gaze softened as she realized. They were about to go talk to a woman that openly and proudly called for Aliana’s death right to her face. Of course she wouldn’t be looking forward to that. “...Oh, Alie,” she said barely above a whisper before pulling Aliana into a hug.

Aliana wrapped her arms tightly around Rey’s waist, burying her face into the Jedi’s neck as she started to tremble. She wasn’t afraid of Leia, the prospect of being in the same room with her just... sounded dreadful. And she couldn’t just kill her like she would normally do to someone this belligerent with her. In the Resistance, she *had* to play nice, something she really wasn’t accustomed to.

Rey gently stroked the thick curls of Aliana’s hair as another hand ran along the Sith’s back. She could tell that the thought of seeing Leia again made her viscerally uncomfortable. She didn’t want to subject Alie to that if she could help it. She pulled away slightly, giving her the chance to look into those beautiful crimson eyes. “What if I just go up there and talk to her?” she asked gently. “Give you the chance to relax and get acquainted with the ship?”

“Are... are you sure?” Aliana asked, looking up at her and grasping the front of her robes.

“I’m sure,” Rey nodded. “You shouldn’t have to deal with the General right after a skirmish like that,” she said, rubbing Aliana’s shoulder reassuringly. “Besides, I want to see if she’s learned about us yet and if we could ‘surprise’ her with it later,” she added, a mischievous tone slipping into her voice.

Aliana shook her head, “Please don’t do that. The last thing I need is more accusations of deception coming from Jedi.”

Rey blinked, somewhat surprised that Aliana wouldn’t leap at the chance to make Leia angrier. She must have become very bothered by the General’s constant antagonism. “Alright,” she said in concession. “I won’t do that. Sorry.”

“Thanks,” Aliana laid her head against Rey’s chest, squeezing her waist tighter, “I don’t know why, I’m just... really tired. Like, emotionally. I just don’t have the energy to deal with any more Jedi garbage.”

“It’s ok,” Rey said, tilting down to kiss Aliana’s forehead. “You don’t need to explain yourself to me. I’ll handle Leia while you go recuperate. Does that sound good?”

Aliana nodded, kissing Rey’s cheek as she pulled away from the Jedi, “Thanks Rey, I appreciate it.”

Aliana yawned as she made her way to the mess hall. It seemed like a good place to start. She’d considered going back to the Fury and having a nap, but the more she thought about it the more she realized that wasn’t the kind of fatigue she was feeling and that it wouldn’t help. She’d just wake up still tired and with the added grogginess of sleep to make things worse.

As she turned a corner, she almost ran face-first into someone, jolting back when she sensed a tingle in her spine warning her of danger.

“Whoa!” she yelled, as she looked up, and then her eyes widened when she recognized who she’d almost slammed into, “Finn?”

“Alie?” Finn said, a smile growing on his face. “Hey! It’s great to see you! ...Uh, where’s Rey?” he asked, looking around the corner to see if Rey was there. “Not that I don’t want to see you, or anything. I just thought she’d be with you.”

“Oh, Rey went to the bridge to talk to the general,” Aliana shook her head as she gave Finn a hug, “I really didn’t want to go with her, it’s been a stressful few months.”

“Really? What happened?” Finn said, withdrawing from the hug slightly while still keeping his hands on Aliana’s shoulders. A look of worry grew on his face. “Did the training not go well?”

“Uh...” Aliana hesitated. She really didn’t want to tell anyone else about her history with Luke Skywalker. She probably would never have told Rey if she could have helped it, “The training went fine, it’s just... some personal things that came up that I don’t want to talk about. Thanks though.”

“Oh, ok.” Finn said, nodding in understanding. He could relate to Aliana wanting to keep certain information to herself. “So, I heard what you two did back there,” Finn added, wanting to lighten the mood, if only slightly. “Good work. You managed to keep Poe from getting himself killed.”

“No, I kept Poe from getting other people killed,” Aliana smiled, “That slippery pilot would have no problem getting out of there, and that’s the problem.”

“Oh,” Finn said, his eyes widening in realization. “That’s not good. He’s been getting more and more reckless-”

“Since Starkiller base,” Aliana said with a nod. “I noticed.”

“...Yeah,” Finn said grimacing slightly. “I think he’s let that victory go to his head a bit, huh?”

“A victory that would have quickly been a defeat if left entirely to him,” Aliana shook her head, “How’s everyone else been doing?”

“Not terrible,” Finn said with a slight smile. “I mean, we have to find a new base, so that does kinda suck. Other than that though, we’re doing ok. Moral has pretty good after the attack. We’ve apparently had a steady sprinkle of recruits. The Republic is... well they’re still being quiet about the whole thing, but they aren’t openly condemning us, so that’s good. I managed to give High Command all the information I had on the First Order. That seemed to help operations go more smoothly.” Finn took a moment to consider anything he may have missed. “...I think that’s it.”

“How’d the First Order find D’Qar?” Aliana asked as the two of them made their way to the mess hall.

“We’re still trying to figure that out,” Finn said, shaking his head slightly. “Whatever method they used, it’s news to me.”

As the two of them sat down in the mess hall, Aliana felt herself becoming more energized. Reconnecting with Finn felt good. It felt *really* good. The last time she’d physically seen him, he was dying on a medical bed. And while she’d seen him on the holoterminal since then, it was a different experience entirely to be in the same room with him.

“It’s good to see you back on your feet,” she said, laying a hand on his shoulder, “I’ve missed you.”

Finn smiled, mirroring the gesture and patting Aliana’s shoulder. “I missed you too,” he said. “It’s good to have someone as easy to talk to as you back. I’m still kind of having trouble... fitting in,” Finn said, his frown causing a crease in his forehead, as if he wasn’t sure those were the right words. “I mean... everyone’s nice and all. It’s just outside of Poe, there aren’t many people around here I can... connect with?”

“Yeah I get that,” Aliana smiled, “Sith aren’t that well known for being good friends. Have you been holding up okay though? The general isn’t giving you a hard time?”

“Not a really hard time,” Finn said. “She certainly didn’t like Poe and me yelling at her but she didn’t hold a grudge or anything.”

“Must be nice,” Aliana sighed bitterly as she took a drink from a canteen at her hip.

Finn frowned, worried that he might have said the wrong thing. His eyes fell to her canteen that she held to her lips. “Is that water or do you really like to unwind after a battle?” he asked.

“Water,” Aliana said, sticking the canteen back onto her hip, “I’m just used to carrying it around with me. Good habit to get into when you’re drifting, but it just makes me look like a drunk anywhere else.”

“Ah,” Finn said. “So how long have you been drifting anyway? Y’know, before all of this?”

“Nine years,” Aliana explained, “Every since my mother died, I’ve been kind of aimless and on my own. Finished my training on my own and kinda didn’t know what to do after that. Just... I finished what I spent my life doing and now what?”

“Well, you got this place,” Finn said, gesturing around the mess hall. “You got the Resistance. You got Me and Poe. And you got Rey now. That’s all better than nothing, I think. I know that if I actually ran off like I said I would, I would have been worse off without you all. No matter how safe I was.”

“I know I do,” Aliana nodded, then her face became grim, “Assuming Leia doesn’t kill me in my sleep.”

“We won’t let that happen,” Finn said, putting a hand over Aliana’s. “We got your back, no matter what. Whatever the General thinks of you, she’s one woman and she can’t hurt you while we’re here.”

“Thanks, Finn,” Aliana smiled, leaning on his shoulder and giving him a one-armed hug, “How did that whole ‘yelling at the general’ thing go?”

“We told her what you told us and said it was absolutely unacceptable given everything you’ve done for us so far,” Finn said. “The rest of High Command were shocked and outraged by the accusations, but didn’t seem to think we were lying which was a surprise. Leia denied everything, saying she had no ‘ill will’ towards you. Since then whenever you’ve come up she doesn’t really say anything.”

“So I guess High Command can’t do anything about it with no proof, huh?” Aliana huffed.

Finn shook his head, "Not without actual holo-evidence."

Aliana perked up, "Wait... 2V has records of every holocall that comes in and out of the Fury."

Finn blinked. "Heh, well there you go!" he said with a smile. "Just show that to High Command and that should get Leia off your back."

"Or just make her sit more heavily on it," Aliana shrugged, "She is the top of the food chain here. Most anyone else can do is annoy her about it."

Finn bit his lip, unable to articulate a proper response to that rather unpleasant reality. "...Well I mean, Poe is very good at being annoying," Finn offered. "Trust me."

"Maybe..."

Rey stepped onto the bridge of the Raddus just in time to see Leia slap Poe right across the face, leaving the pilot in shock.

"You're demoted," Leia said firmly, "I gave you a strict order to turn your ship around and come back so we could escape and instead you almost cost us our entire bombing fleet. If Rey hadn't intervened when she did, we'd have a hundred people dead right now."

"General, the fact that we retreated means the First Order still has a functional Dreadnought to hunt us down with later!" Poe countered rather indignantly. "These aren't problems that we can just run away from!"

"And there are some problems that you cannot solve by jumping into an X Wing and blowing something up!" Leia said with exasperation. "I hope one day you learn that."

Leia turned away from Poe, only to notice Rey standing behind her and watching them, "Rey!" she exclaimed, "It's good to see you alive and healthy. I haven't heard a word from Ahch To since the Fury cut all communications."

Rey did not meet Leia's smile with her own. She instead responded with a scowl. "You mean since you told Aliana you hoped that I would kill her for you?" Rey asked, her brow heavily furrowed. "Yeah, neither of us really wanted to talk to you after that."

Leia eyes widened for a moment before her frown deepened. She walked over to Rey and spoke again in a hushed tone of voice. "Rey, look. Whatever Amorosa told yo-

"I saw the holo record, Leia!" Rey interrupted none too quietly. "And I'm not interested in what you have to say on the matter."

"Rey, the last time I saw you, you were quite distrustful of the Sith yourself," Leia frowned, "Why the sudden change?"

"She's proven herself to be trustworthy," Rey said with conviction. "We agreed to absolute transparency between us and she's kept to that agreement. Simple as that." Rey then gestured at Poe who simply stood there as they talked. "Also, on top of the many things she's done for us already, she just saved your flyboy and your entire bombing fleet."

"I-I didn't need saving," Poe muttered under his breath.

“Rey, you don’t know the Sith like I do. If you’re not careful, they’ll destroy everything you hold dear,” Leia warned her, grasping Rey’s arm, “If you let your guard down, the Sith will hurt you in ways you can’t possibly imagine.”

“Alie’s already prevented me from being hurt in ways I can’t possibly imagine, Leia,” Rey glared down at her.

“What do you mean?”

Rey glanced at Poe, and then led Leia to a quiet corner of the bridge, “While I was on Ahch To, I started... developing a Force Bond with Kylo Ren.”

Leia’s eyes widened, though the expression on her face did not suggest a look of horror. Instead it appeared to be a look of... wonder. “A Force Bond? Between you and Ben?” she said a smile growing on her face. “Well I’ll be.”

“Yes, a Force Bond,” Rey nodded, the apparent ease in Leia’s features making a pit of anger begin to burn in her chest. “With Aliana’s help, we managed to put a shield around my mind, blocking the connection indefinitely.”

Just as soon as the smile appeared on Leia’s face, it vanished. “...What!? Why?” she asked incredulously.

“Because I hated it,” Rey said plainly. “I hate *him* . He kidnapped me, broke into my mind without my consent, treated me like a possession, tried to kill me and Finn, succeeded in killing Han Solo, and all the while on Ahch To, hounded me, treated my thoughts and feelings with disdain and treated me like filth, like I was nothing compared to him and that I needed him to save me.”

Rey shook her head, trying to hold back the burning rage that built up inside of her. “Aliana never did that to me. She held the truth from me, yes, but she never treated me so cruelly. She never invaded my mind, she only ever treated me with respect and she cared about what I had to say. She helped me grow into the Jedi I am today and when she blocked the connection she did so with so much care and focus that she seriously hurt herself, just to make sure the act didn’t hurt me in any way.”

Rey took a deep breath and turned away from Leia. Her hands were trembling, and she was fighting the urge to just run back to the Fury. That Leia’s face seemed to lighten up at the prospect of a Force Bond with Kylo Ren was something she found deeply troubling. Maybe she was desperate to have her son back and thought such a bond could facilitate that. Rey shuddered at the idea that she would be used in such a way.

“Leia... I get that you have issues with the Sith. And I’m sorry about what Vader did to you, really I am,” she said, “But if you want me to be in the Resistance as a Jedi, then Alie’s inclusion is not negotiable. I won’t allow you to be this cruel to the woman I love.”

Leia’s face assumed a look of horror that Rey felt should have been there a moment ago when she told her about the Force Bond. “Rey... you haven’t-”

“I would never ask you to forgive Vader for what he’s done to you,” Rey interjected. “Don’t ask me to forgive Kylo for all he’s done to me. But more importantly, don’t ask me to turn away Aliana after everything she’s done *for* me.”

“Rey-”

“Don’t.” Rey said, holding her hand up, “Don’t say anything else to me until you’ve made things right with Alie. Don’t think I won’t take her and the Fury and leave the Resistance behind. Don’t force me to choose, because the Resistance will not win that contest.”

Leia froze. The others in the war room tried to look at the two of them inconspicuously to try and piece together what they were talking about out of ear shot. The general feeling in the room was tension, thick and suffocating.

Sighing in defeat, Leia looked down and held a hand up. “Alright,” she said in an uncharacteristically defeatist tone.

Rey recognized from Leia’s tone that this wasn’t over, but opted to take the small victory where she could. She quickly exited the bridge, leaving Leia to mull over what she’d said. At the tactical station, Amilyn Holdo was watching her carefully. She’d heard about Leia’s holocall with Amorosa, but Leia had denied it and with no proof they could only let the issue drop. Even with proof there was little anyone else could do. Leia was the General, the rest of them were subordinates. Still, her and Ackbar could put less official pressure on her.

She was still having trouble adjusting to all of this, however. Amorosa’s presence and even mention seemed to unbalance Leia to a highly unusual degree. Even Darth Vader hadn’t gotten her this antagonistic.

Then again, she said to herself, Vader wasn’t an ally.

Amilyn got up from her post and left the bridge, following after Rey. At the very least, the two needed to know that someone in High Command was on their side.

“Excuse me?” Amilyn called out. “Master Jedi?”

Rey stopped in her tracks and looked back to see the Admiral walk up to her. “Admiral, good to see you again,” Rey said in a polite, yet tired tone.

“Same to you, Rey,” she said with a smile. “It’s been quite awhile. Last time I got a good look at you, you were excitedly wandering around the safehouse.”

Rey laughed slightly at the pleasant memory. “”Yeah... did you need anything, Admiral?”

“I just wanted you to know that I sympathize with the stress that you and Amorosa are under,” she said softly. “Not all of us agree with the General’s distrust of her. Sadly, we’re not in much of a position to do anything about it.”

“I appreciate that, Admiral,” Rey nodded, “I wish there was something that could be done. I know the General has her own demons to work through, but it’s not fair of her to make that my problem. And the way she looked at me when I told her I loved Alie...” she trailed off, staring at the floor.

“I understand, Rey,” Amilyn said. “She is far from objective in this regard, so take anything she says about her with the biggest grain of salt you have.” A warm smile grew on her face as she placed a hand on Rey’s shoulder. “On a lighter note, I am extremely happy for the two of you,” she said with almost a giggle. “You two are very good for each other.”

Rey brightened up at this, “You really think so?” she asked. She hadn’t realized how much she’d been wanting to talk to someone about her relationship that wouldn’t just throw scorn on her.

“Absolutely,” Holdo said with a chipper tone. “Aliana is a remarkable woman in her own right and you already bring out the best of her. You yourself are smart, capable and have an enviable level of virtue. I honestly couldn’t think of two people better suited for each other.”

“Thanks, Admiral,” Rey smiled, “That’s really nice to hear. It’s been mostly Leia and Luke offering their opinions on Alie and our relationship and they’ve not been very supportive.”

“Skywalkers opinions are more than a little rigid when it comes to this sort of thing,” Amilyn said with a frown. “They look down on the Dark Side and those who use it because they are in a position to do so. The rest of us without such power with the Force can’t afford to be so picky.”

Rey nodded, having come to that conclusion regarding Luke and Leia herself. As Jedi, they were extremely biased. As Skywalkers, with Vader’s legacy hanging over their head, they were even more so.

“I know I shouldn’t be taking it too seriously, but... that’s still my girlfriend she’s being so cruel to,” Rey said, “It’d be even more cruel if I just let her suffer in silence.”

“It would be wrong to let it go unaddressed,” Amilyn said with a nod. “And it speaks wonders to your character that you refuse to do that. You’re already more of a Jedi than any of us could hope for. Take pride in that.”

“Thanks, Admiral.”

Kylo Ren threw his helmet across the room, screaming in rage. He’d been trying for a week, but his connection to Rey had somehow been blocked. Not cut off completely, he could still vaguely feel her presence at times, but it was like she was on the other side of a durasteel wall. He had no idea how they’d managed it, but they had managed to keep him away from the Jedi. A fact which infuriated him.

This is not how this was supposed to go. None of it was! Somehow the Sith managed to stop his plans at every possible turn. He hated it. He hated her. More than he’s ever hated anyone in his life, which was saying something. Kylo stormed over to the helmet that fell hard into the floor and drove his boot down onto it hard. The metal buckled under his stomp, shattering into pieces on the floor. A demonstration of the darkness that fueled his strength. Strength that gave him power and authority among the First Orders ranks, but wasn’t enough to kill the one person he so desperately despised.

He screamed at the shattered helmet beneath him, imagining Amorosa’s head in its place. His screams echoed against the durasteel walls of his quarters causing his ears to ring. Even alone in the privacy of his chambers, the power he commanded all but feeding his strife.

The Supreme Leader would be furious to hear that he had yet again failed to recapture the girl. That he had yet again allowed the Sith to best him. That he couldn’t even achieve victory with a Force Bond, one of the strongest connections the Force can possibly make.

He was through. The Supreme Leader would abandon his training and send him adrift for sure.

He couldn't let that happen. He had to salvage this mission before Snoke discovered his failure.

His raging and self loathing was interrupted by an casual and almost condescending knock on his chamber doors.

"Can you have your tantrums a little more quietly?" came a deep voice that Kylo recognized as one of his fellow knights. "Your sending ripples through the Force all over the ship," they said with annoyance.

Kylo didn't say anything in response, but fell silent regardless. He quietly fumed on his bed as he imagined all the horrible things he would do to the Sith once he got his hands on her.

Rey found Aliana and Finn sat on a bench in the escape pod bay with Poe and a rather short woman in a maintenance uniform. Aliana and the woman seemed to be getting along, which made Rey happy. The fear that Aliana would be unwelcome in the Resistance was a baseless one as it was only Leia who was distrustful of her, but it was nice to see it abated regardless.

And it was nice to be back with her girlfriend after having listened to Leia make accusations against her. She smiled as she approached and slid between Aliana and Finn, kissing the Sith's cheek, "Well don't let me do that ever again."

Aliana gave Rey a look of sympathy. "Oh poor sweetie," she said softly before wrapping her arms around Rey's shoulders. "I take that it didn't go well?"

"About as well as it could have," Rey said, finding herself unable to frown while on the receiving end of Aliana's affection. "I hadn't realized how... exhausting it would be to deal with the General."

"Certainly sounds exhausting," the woman beside Finn said before realizing that all eyes were suddenly on her, making her feel somewhat nervous. "Um... hi there, Master Jedi. I'm Rose Tico. ... Big fan,"

"She's Paige's sister," Aliana clarified. "We met her in the mess hall."

"Nice to meet you, Rose" Rey said with a smile, "And I'm not a Master. I'm barely a Jedi at all, to be honest."

"She's a Padawan," Aliana corrected her, "Or... Apprentice if you're feeling charitable," she said with a smirk.

"I'm still not going to call you Master," Rey said with narrowed eyes which was betrayed by the smile on her face.

"Tease," Aliana pouted before kissing her cheek. "So what did Leia say?"

Rey almost immediately grimaced as she recalled the encounter. "Well... I confronted her about what she said to you. She was defensive of course. Then when I told her about the Force Bond with Kylo Ren and-"

"The what!?" Finn said, a look of shock and growing horror on his face.

“Long story, tell you later,” Aliana turned around to reassure Finn. “He can’t get into her head anymore. Anyways, continue, Rey.”

“-And when she learned about the bond, she... her face lit up. I don’t know why, but she seemed to be so happy that there was a connection between Kylo and I.”

“Why... why would she be happy about that?” Poe asked, looking mortified, “Didn’t he probe your mind like with me?”

“Yes!” Rey said. “He has been nothing but pure evil since any of us have known him! Why would she be happy about this!? And what gets infuriating is that when I told her that Alie and I are together, she looked absolutely mortified! Why did she find that horrific but not this!?”

“Because I’m a Sith Lord,” Aliana shrugged, seemingly unbothered by this revelation, “And I’m supposed to be evil. Not her precious son. She doesn’t want to accept that.”

“What are you talking about?” Finn asked.

“Before Starkiller Base, Leia asked Han to bring their son home. I heard them. That’s why Han approached Kylo Ren the way he did. Leia is convinced that he can be turned back to the Light and tried to get Han to appeal to him because he’s his father,” Aliana explained, “And that’s why she can’t stand me, because I’m shattering that belief that the Dark Side made her son evil and that he actually chose to be that way on his own. And it looks like Leia might try to use the Force Bond with you as a way to turn Kylo back to the Light.”

“Why would that work? I hate the man,” Rey asked, looking confused as she tried to process everything Aliana had said.

“She was convinced Han could do what Luke couldn’t because Luke was a Jedi while Han was his father,” Aliana shrugged, “I guess now the rationale is that Han was his father, you’re... a girl.”

Rey’s face went green as she suddenly felt the intense urge to vomit. “Oh... Oh, God... I... I don’t feel good,” she said before slumping against Aliana.

“Do you need a bucket, love?” Aliana asked, stroking Rey’s back as she supported.

“No, no,” Rey said with a dismissive wave. “I haven’t had anything to eat lately. I’d just dry heave.” As the wave of disgust passed over her, the rage remained. “That is disgusting and Leia should feel ashamed of herself for that.”

“I know, Rey,” Aliana said sympathetically. “It’s underhanded and manipulative an-”

“It’s not just that!” Rey said with indignance. “It’s the fact that she can still believe that Kylo Ren is worth saving and still treat YOU like trash! This is Luke all over again! Are they really so obsessed with trying to save members of their family that they cannot see their own hypocrisy!?”

Aliana paused. She’d expected Rey to be outraged that Leia was conspiring to use her like a tool, and wasn’t prepared for Leia’s treatment of her to be the main focal point of Rey’s ire. Try as she might, she was still getting used to having support in her life.

“I... uh...” Aliana stammered, completely caught off guard.

“She honestly cannot be reasoned with!” Rey said, continuing to fume. “How can she- I just-! What more do you have to do to earn her trust? Not even that! What more do you have to do to just make her stop treating you like the scum of the galaxy!?”

“...I don’t think there’s anything I can do, Rey,” Aliana explained. “I guess I just have to play nice and bear it.”

“You shouldn’t have to!” Rey countered. “Her issues with the Sith are not your damned problem!”

“You’re right, they’re not,” Aliana shrugged, “But there’s nothing I can do about Leia’s denial unless I go into her brain and rewrite her memories. For her I’m both a reminder of what Vader turned into, and a cold reality check that the Dark Side isn’t responsible for Kylo Ren’s genocidal rampage throughout the galaxy. He was a violent, hateful bastard before he turned to the Dark Side. I have the scars to prove it. But Leia won’t listen to any of that.”

Rey’s white knuckled fist tore slightly at the fabric of her trousers. She bristled with rage that she could quell properly in a cruiser full of people. Leia’s bullheaded stubbornness was not only infuriating, it was potentially reckless and was bound to get someone hurt sooner or later. The worst thing about it was the fact that everyone in the Resistance was next to helpless to stop it.

“...Did anyone else in the High Command share her opinion?” Poe asked.

Rey shook her head, biting down her smoldering rage for a moment. “No. In fact after I left the War Room, Admiral Holdo came after me to apologize about Leia and say she agrees with me.”

“Well Leia might be General, but she’ll have a hard time doing anything to either of you if the rest of High Command is against her,” Poe said reassuringly, “Generals get nowhere without support.”

“That’s true,” Rose said. “Besides, you two are already heroes to the Resistance. The General can’t ignore that.”

“Wait, why am I a hero?” Rey asked. “I haven’t done anything yet.”

“Leia has hyped you up as the Resistance’s greatest hope,” Finn explained. “That coupled with what Aliana’s done has set you guys about on even ground in terms of Resistance fame.”

Aliana and Rey both looked at each other, looking very disturbed by this new information, “She’s... been hyping me up as our greatest hope?”

“That’s... that’s a lot of pressure to put on a Padawan so early in her training,” Aliana said quietly.

“Yeah, I don’t feel comfortable with such... reverence placed on me,” Rey said, squirming uncomfortably in her seat.

“Well... hopefully, things will simmer down as time goes on,” Finn said before turning his gaze over to Poe. “Like Poe’s ego.”

“Excuse me?!” Poe balked.

“You’re excused.”

Chapter End Notes

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Still In Love With a Gay Woman

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

A pair of crimson blades clashed against each other. Streaks of fiery swings filled the vacated cargo hold accompanied with the crackling thunder of their clashes. Quick feather light footsteps sent the two fighters flying to and fro within the large, empty room. Explosive passion rocked against the wall of serene focus like waves crashing against a cliffside. This was the latest of many dances performed between Jedi and Sith.

Very seldom it was, however, that both dancers looked at one another with such fondness.

Every strike Rey parried or flipped over earned another smile from Aliana. Every clash and struggle of strength brought forth an amused smirk from both parties. The fluidity and grace in their motions was a testament to their skill as well as their knowledge of one another. This was a dance they had practiced many times together. Every time they always felt a little closer together to one another, regardless of who won the match, though Aliana was still leading in that regard.

At this point however, the two more often than not met at a stalemate. This match was no different as another mighty clash sent a wave of thundering power rippling through the metal of the room, echoing throughout the cruiser. The two combatants took that moment to catch their breath and admire each other in the warm glow of their locked swords.

“Very good,” Aliana said with a smile. “Your form is much better. Far less telegraphed.”

“Flatterer,” Rey said, deactivating her lightsaber. “Of course this is just the beginning. Once I finish making my new saberstaff, it’s over for you.”

“I have no doubt,” Aliana said, clipping her hilt to her belt. “Seriously though, I cannot be more proud of how far you’ve come.”

Rey smiled. Aliana’s praise was always something special to her, but it made her heart swell ever since she’d stopped trying to keep a wall between them. She brushed a strand of hair out of her face and glanced down at her lightsaber. She’d been working hard on the acrobatic form Aliana had taught her about, both with her lightsaber and the training staff. She’d gone a full two months without clipping herself with the latter, and had started work on a proper lightsaber on the way to rejoin the fleet. She felt alive and full of energy the deeper into the Ataru form she got, and the more she practiced it the more at home she felt. She’d practiced several others, specifically Makashi and Soresu at Aliana’s insistence for the sake of breadth. But the freedom and exhilaration she got from Ataru left her full of life at the end of every sparring session.

But something was prodding at her mind. Aliana had taught her about six lightsaber forms, but the one she was using was completely unrecognizable to her. She hooked her lightsaber back onto her belt and sat down on a crate as she stared at her girlfriend.

“Alie?” Rey asked, drawing her attention, “What lightsaber form are you using? I don’t recognize it from your lessons.”

Aliana smiled and pulled up another crate, sitting down as well, “Form Seven, Juyo,” she explained, “It’s an extremely fast and aggressive style that uses the Force to fuel its need for total domination of the opponent. It’s nicknamed Ferocity.”

“Huh,” Rey said, her curiosity piqued. “Is there any particular reason that you haven’t taught me that one?”

“I haven’t taught it to you *yet*,” Aliana clarified, “and it’s because mastering Juyo requires intimate mastery of the first six forms. That, and it’s a form very much steeped in the Dark Side. Very easy to get lost in the rage if you’re not careful.”

“Control the Darkness, never surrender,” Rey said with a nod, remembering Aliana’s lesson to her. “Okay, that makes sense. For a minute, I thought you were holding out on me,” she explained with a small huff of laughter.

“I wouldn’t dream of it, love,” Aliana said before leaning forward to give Rey a fond kiss on the cheek, “But I think you’re ready for lightsaber combat in battle. You have a Lord’s proficiency with a lightsaber now. Were you a Sith, your training would be complete.”

“Well I’m certainly pleased to qualify as an honorary Sith,” Rey said with a cheeky grin. Any retort from Aliana was interrupted by a sudden rapping at the door.

“It got real quiet all of a sudden,” Finn said from beyond the door. “Is it safe to come in, yet?”

Rey rolled her eyes and opened the door with a wave of her hand. “Don’t worry Finn. Everything is fine.”

“Okay good,” Finn sighed in relief looking around the unmarred cargo room. “I still don’t get why you two insist on sparring with deadly laser swords.”

“The deadly laser swords are part of the training,” Aliana replied. “It’s all about learning control and trusting in one’s own skill when the stakes are high.”

“And how many times did she burn you?” Finn asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Only twelve,” Aliana scoffed, “And besides, you’ll have to learn this too, eventually.”

Finn shifted somewhat uncomfortably where he stood. He was very much looking forward to learning the ways of the Force and the lightsaber training that came with it. At the same time, the thought of being near a lightsaber again made his back itch with an unpleasant memory.

“Hey,” Rey said, calling Finn back to the present. “He won’t be able to hurt you again,” she offered. “Not with the right training.”

Finn took a deep breath and nodded. “I know. Thanks,” he said with a grateful smile.

“Me and Rey will make sure if you come up against any Knight, that not only can you defend yourself you can make them run home with their tails between their legs,” Aliana smiled, squeezing Finn’s shoulder, “They’re gonna yell ‘Run! It’s a stormtrooper with a lightsaber!’”

“Oh shut up,” Finn said, fighting the urge to laugh.

“Those tarp wearing sad sacks won’t know what hit them when they meet you,” Rey said with a smile.

The two of them hugged Finn as they laughed, Rey even going as far as to kiss his cheek, “It’s good to have you back.”

Amilyn looked up from her datapad to see Leia leave the War Room. There was a definite tension in her step as of late. Ever since Aliana and Rey came back, Leia had been especially bitter in how she talked and acted. It didn’t interfere with Resistance matters so no one thought to bring it up or confront it, but it definitely made their scheduled meetings more aggravating to get through.

When Leia turned the corner, Amilyn allowed herself a small sigh as she could already feel the tension in the room melt away. It even felt a few degrees warmer.

“Relieved, Holdo?” asked Admiral Ackbar in his notoriously gurgly voice.

“You have no idea,” Amilyn sighed as she set down the datapad and stood up, “I swear, sometimes it seems like we’re about to have a repeat of the early days of the Empire on our hands. If we don’t find a new site for a base soon, the ship might tear itself apart.”

“The tension aboard the cruiser is daunting,” Ackbar nodded in agreement. “A very inopportune time to let distrust and uncertainty settle in.”

“I worry that we might not have a choice in that regard,” Amilyn said grimly. “It seems that nothing we can say or do will make Leia happy apart from just sending Aliana away.”

“Which would be unwise for a number of reasons,” Ackbar noted, his large eyes suddenly looking very tired.

“I fear a confrontation is inevitable. We’ve tried reasoning with Leia and it isn’t working,” Amilyn shook her head, “The only solution may be the old fashioned child on a hot stove approach.”

“Meaning?”

“Eventually she’s going to push the Sith too far, and get burned,” Amilyn explained, “Amorosa is cordial, but she is still Sith to the core. She likely won’t hesitate to kill someone she perceives as a threat.”

Ackbar’s expression became far more grim. “And we are to simply stand aside as that happens?” he asked incredulously.

“I don’t like it anymore than you do, but it’s the only way Leia will learn,” Amilyn said.

“If she lives to take that message to heart,” Ackbar stressed. “I understand that the General has become difficult to work with, but what you’re suggesting we do, or rather allow to happen, comes dangerously close to treason.”

“It will ultimately depend on what Amorosa chooses to do when Leia is at her mercy. What happens at that point is out of our hands” Amilyn said with a shrug. “Besides, we’re technically a splinter group whose actions are not sanctioned by the Republic. We aren’t strangers to breaking the rules.”

“We still have principles to stand by, Holdo.”

“And Leia has broken those principles through her hostility to an ally,” Amilyn said, “Any fight she provokes will be her own responsibility. Regardless, I’m more concerned about what I heard in the sublight engines about her potentially using young Rey as bait for her son.”

Ackbar tilted his head slightly. “Ben Solo? The Dark Jedi? I’m not sure I follow, Amilyn.”

“It was all very Force Mystic, but from what I gathered Leia was rather excited to hear about a bond of some sort between Rey and Kylo Ren, and was then alarmed to hear that Amorosa had blocked the connection,” Amilyn explained, “And was horrified to learn that Rey and Amorosa have begun a relationship.”

Ackbar shook his head slightly. “Such relationships can make it difficult to remain objective in times of war, but I can’t imagine any tangible reason for Leia to object to it with all Amorosa has done for the cause,” he said, “And I won’t even pretend to know what this Force Bond business is about but if Ben Solo is involved, it can’t be good.”

“Especially if it involves Rey,” Amilyn nodded, “I don’t know what’s going on in Leia’s head, but that girl has been through enough at Solo’s hands already and I personally will not stand for her being used as bait.”

“It’s clear that something must be done,” Ackbar nodded in agreement. “I simply hope that something will not have to involve mutiny of any kind. Our numbers are small enough as it is. If we fight too fiercely amongst ourselves, the First Order will benefit from it.”

“Agreed. There has to be something we can do to give them just a little more...” Amilyn trailed off and a smile slowly spread across her face.

“What? What are you thinking?”

“I’m thinking perhaps our young Jedi and Sith deserve a field promotion,” Amilyn smirked.

Being a Calamari, Ackbar’s face could do little in terms of visible expression, at least to the untrained eye. In that instance however, he had an unmistakable look of surprise.

Rey and Aliana’s footsteps echoed slightly through the corridor as they made their way to the flight deck. Aliana turned to see a puzzled expression on Rey’s face. She reached out with her hand and intertwined their fingers together. “You alright, love?” she asked.

“Just thinking,” Rey said. “I fear that whatever Amylin called the both of us in to talk about, it can’t be good.”

“Hey, chin up,” Aliana said reassuringly as she laid a hand on Rey’s shoulder, “You said so yourself that Holdo’s been a lot more friendly. I’m sure it’s not that bad.”

“Oh yeah, she’s been wonderful,” Rey said, leaning into Aliana’s comforting touch. “I’m just worried if she’s calling us in to discuss something Force related. Like, what if they learned the First Order has some Force based superweapon. What if it’s something worse? From the deep dark? What if they found a... a black hole with tentacles and they’re gonna look to us to know what to do?”

“Black hole with tentacles?” Aliana asked with an arched brow, surprised at Rey’s vivid imagination.

“Oh you know!” Rey huffed. “Something horrible and unfathomable!”

“Rey, you’re getting carried away with yourself,” Aliana said, laying a hand on Rey’s shoulder, “I’m pretty sure the First Order doesn’t have a Force-based superweapon. If they did, you could sense it half a galaxy away.”

Rey took a calming breath. This was true. Ever since she left Ahch To, her ability to reach out through the Force was sharpened to a fine point. Where as before, her senses could reach as far as the island. These days she could sense life across three systems with enough focus. If the First Order was sporting something as powerful and horrific as she envisioned, it wouldn’t have been hard to find.

“You’re right,” Rey said with a smile. “I don’t know why my imagination got away from me there.”

Aliana took Rey’s hand in her’s and squeezed gently, pulling the Jedi closer to her as they continued on toward the bridge. Rey had been nervous about anything to do with Resistance High Command ever since her confrontation with Leia. The General’s reactions to the Force Bond, the knowledge that it was blocked, and her relationship with Aliana had all greatly shaken her faith in her and now she kept away from the bridge as much as possible.

What was worse was that still being in Hyperspace meant the hangars were locked down, meaning that they couldn’t just retreat to the Fury. They’d been given quarters, but High Command had put them on opposite ends of the ship in crowded bunks. In Aliana’s case, she had woken up on more than one occasion during the last few days to find someone staring at her.

“I swear once we get out of Hyperspace I’m getting back on my ship,” Aliana said as she cracked her neck, “Wearing robes to bed is so uncomfortable.”

Rey let out a small laugh as she leaned over to nuzzle the top of Aliana’s head. “It will be nice for us to be closer together again,” she said softly. “I miss getting to walk up to you and hold you first thing in the morning.”

As they turned the corner and stepped upon the flight deck, Holdo was there, smiling at the two as they approached.

“That was quick,” Amilyn said.

“We move fast, Admiral,” Aliana nodded, “What did you want us for? Is there a problem?”

“Quite the opposite actually,” Amilyn said with a smile before lifting a hand and gesturing the two to follow her to her office.

Rey and Aliana followed, a look of relief apparent on the Jedi’s face as they stepped into the room with Holdo. The office was rather sparse in terms of decoration, save for a few holostills of people they could only presume were loved ones and a few medals hanging on the wall. They took a seat on the opposite end of the desk and presented themselves as neutral as they could.

“So what can we help you with, Admiral?” Rey asked.

“In light of your successes on Starkiller Base, as well as the fact that the two of you are the only Force-Users currently in the Resistance at all, I feel it necessary to give you both the commendations you deserve,” Amilyn explained, “Therefore I am granting the both of you a field promotion to the rank of Commander and grant you full authority over your respective Orders for the remainder of the war.”

Rey had a look of genuine shock on her face. Aliana’s eyes widened in surprise but not so much. “...Huh,” Aliana said. “I can’t imagine that the General was fond of this choice.”

“General Organa was absent when this decision was passed by High Command, but rest assured she will come to understand it was the right call,” Holdo said with a cheeky smirk.

“I... I’m more surprised we’re being given a command at all,” Rey said, shrugging. “I just assumed that Jedi and Sith were our ranks. That’s what it seemed like at least.”

“No, there are no such ranks,” Amilyn shook her head, “However, I have also taken the liberty of adding the Jedi Order and Sith Order as official allies to the Resistance. Any additional Jedi or Sith who join our cause will answer to the two of you respectively and you will be part of High Command meetings from this point onward.”

“Wow,” Aliana said, visibly impressed. “Can’t say I was expecting that either. “Thanks, Admiral. I appreciate it.”

“The pleasure is mine,” Holdo said, sitting back in her seat. “It’s important that we welcome all who are willing to fight the First Order.”

Rey hands fidgeted in her lap. “I’m just a little concerned because, well, I don’t really have military experience,” she said plainly, “I’ve been a scavenger and a Jedi, but I’ve never really commanded anyone.”

“I’ll be blunt with you, Rey,” Amilyn smiled, “This promotion is first and foremost a way to grant the two of you the power to officially challenge the General’s opposition. I’m hoping that this will force her to play nice, and discourage her any ulterior motives that may or may not exist.”

Clarity arose in Rey’s expression, another small wave of relief flowing through her. “Oh, I see,” she said with a smile.

“I told you that you had friends in High Command,” Amilyn said with a look of satisfaction, “Commander,” she finished.

Aliana was quiet as she looked down at her lap. She was still trying to process what she’d just heard. Holdo trusted her enough to give her authority, specifically to make Leia back down? She hadn’t expected this. She’d expected at best condemnation and little else. For the Admiralty to just wash their hands of the situation and act like they could do nothing about Leia’s behavior. She hadn’t expected to be given what amounted to full autonomy.

“I... thank you, Admiral,” she said quietly.

“You are most welcome Amorosa,” Amilyn said cheerfully. “The rest of the ship will be notified of your promotion at the next briefing and you will be given all the privileges your new titles provide,” she explained. “Including new quarters. I imagine you two would like to have sleeping arrangements closer together after all,”

Rey felt her cheeks turn a slight shade of pink as she grinned somewhat sheepishly. "Heh, guilty," she said.

"I suppose," Aliana nodded with a growing smirk, "Though personally I'd rather they just be the same quarters," she said, giving Rey a playful nudge.

"That could certainly be arranged," Amilyn said, noting Rey turning a bolder shade of red. "I'm sure High Command wouldn't object to freeing up the living space."

Despite being flustered, Rey did very much like the idea of sharing a room with Aliana. She always loved spending time with the other woman, especially with their sleeping arrangements being so far apart on the cruiser. "That-That would be nice. Thank you Admiral," Rey said softly before giving Aliana a playful nudge of her own.

"Very well. I'll have the arrangements made," Amilyn nodded, "We'll be dropping out of Hyperspace in a day. You're dismissed."

Aliana and Rey nodded at the Admiral and rose to their feet, stepping out of the room. As they made their way down the flight deck, Aliana draped an arm over Rey's shoulder. "See?" Aliana said with a smile. "Nothing bad happened. No black holes with tentacles. Just a promotion."

"A promotion and new quarters..." Rey said quietly.

"It'll be good to have privacy," Aliana smiled, "I am SO not used to sleepwear."

Rey's eyes narrowed in momentary confusion before they shot wide open in realization. The blush returned to her face. "...Oh, I see," she said quietly. "...Just so we're clear, does that mean you..." she trailed off, her face beet red.

Aliana responded with a smile and a playful wink. "You'll see," she cooed.

"Alie!"

Aliana couldn't help but laugh as she brought an arm around Rey's shoulders and kissed her cheek, "I sleep naked, Rey."

Rey felt her breath catch in her throat as the thought of Aliana naked in bed flooded her mind. Aliana was always beautiful, but imagining the Sith's bare silhouette laid out against bed sheets made her mind reel. Rey cleared her throat, attempting to recover from her flustered stupor.

"Well that's interesting! Hey, I'm starved!" she said abruptly. "You wanna head over to the mess hall real quick?"

Aliana looked at Rey curiously and they both stopped in the corridor, "You okay? I didn't like... freak you out or anything?"

"No, no it's fine!" Rey answered. "It's just the thought of you naked fills me with... thoughts. Thoughts I'm not sure I'm quite ready for," she said, trying not to sound meek. "I mean... if you just sleep naked, that's fine. I might stare at you for a bit because you're just so damn pretty, but it's fine. I just hope... you don't expect something to happen... right away. You know?"

"Oh," Aliana said, a look of relief on her face, "Oh yeah, of course sweetie. If you're not ready then you'll hear no objection from me." She wrapped her arms around Rey's shoulders and hugged her

tightly, "I can wear clothes to bed if it'll make you more comfortable."

Rey looked over to the side as she pondered the offer. "I mean... you'd be fine, right?" she asked. "Like the sleepwear wouldn't interfere with your rest?"

"No, I just wake up and it's all twisted everywhere," Aliana shrugged, "It's annoying at most. Of course the soldiers staring at me sure as hell doesn't help."

"Oof," Rey winced. She knew that waking up to someone that wasn't Aliana looking at her would definitely make her uncomfortable. "Then, if it's okay, I would appreciate it if we slept with clothes on. At least for the first night and see how we feel."

"Yeah no problem," Aliana smiled, kissing her cheek, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to make you feel pressured or anything."

Rey smiled, Aliana's soft kisses always helped calm her mind. "Oh don't worry," she said softly, pulling Alie closer against her. "You didn't. I just wanted things to be clear."

A heavy crash brought the edge of the vibroblade down onto the dummy, leaving a deep dent in the durasteel. As satisfied as he was with the progress, Finn winced as the shock of the impact went right up his hand. He was gripping the sword too hard, he knew that, but when the vibration was active it was hard to hold steady.

He knew a lightsaber wouldn't be this unwieldy, he'd certainly wielded one before, but with Anakin's lightsaber being lost there was little he could actually practice with. So he made do. Finn closed his eyes, took a deep breath and steadied himself again. His mind's eye imagined being enveloped within the heat of battle. He moved his blade slowly through the motions that Aliana taught him, parrying and cutting through the enemies he envisioned.

"At it again, are we?" Poe's voice called out, shattering the illusion in Finn's mind.

Finn flinched in surprise and almost dropped his vibroblade before deactivating it and glaring at the other man. "Yes, I am," he said sharply. "And I'd appreciate it if you didn't sneak up on me like that."

Poe looked around where he was standing, against the doorframe a good 20 feet away from Finn who stood in the center of the makeshift training room. "Aren't you Force types supposed to be able to sense people's presence?" Poe teased.

"I haven't been trained yet," Finn huffed as he sat down on a crate, setting the vibroblade against the wall, "Rey and Alie have been busy, so I've just been practicing on my own. Don't even know where to start with the Force."

Poe walked over to Finn, sitting beside him. "Well once we touch down someplace safe, I'm sure Rey and Alie will be able to help you out. The more Force trained people we have, the better."

Finn shrugged. "I hope so. It would be nice to actually have some idea what I'm doing."

"Speaking of which, which one do you want to be trained as?" Poe asked. "Jedi or Sith?"

Finn's brow furrowed as he looked away, genuinely confused by Poe's question. Was there much of a difference? He hadn't really been able to tell, if he was being honest. He figured he would probably get most of his training from Aliana, being the more skilled of the two, but he'd never given much thought to what that would actually mean.

He was tempted to say either one would suffice, but then he thought about the General and how she'd been treating Aliana and immediately recoiled from the idea.

"Probably a Jedi," he said sheepishly, "Less hassle."

"That's fair," Poe nodded. "The Republic does love their Jedi so it will be good for PR."

Finn huffed out a small laughter. "Never took you for a guy to care about PR," he said.

"Oh, I'm not," Poe admitted. "I'm probably talking out of my ass right now."

BB-8 rolled over to the two of them, beeping in agreement. Poe smiled and patted his dome.

"So, given much thought to what you wanna do after the war?" Poe asked as BB-8 rolled around to nestle between his feet. He ran a hand over BB-8's dome, frowning at the scratches he'd taken and resolving to give him a good tune-up, "I mean, there's gotta be at least some peace time before the next Empire, right?" he laughed.

Another question that gave Finn significant pause. Before resolving to help the Resistance, he was content with finding someplace to hide away from the First Order, which was as much immediate thought as he ever gave the future. Ever since joining the fight, he considered simply living to see the First Order's defeat as the end goal. The finishing line. If he did live to see that day, what awaited him beyond that? He was raised to be a soldier and chose to be a rebel. What would happen to him in a time of peace?

"...I guess... I'll do Jedi stuff?" Finn responded, uncertainty heavy in his voice.

"You really haven't thought about any of this, have you?" Poe asked, laying a hand on his shoulder.

Finn shook his head, "Since I defected, I've just been trying to stay alive. I almost failed at even doing that," he said as he felt a twinge in his back. He'd been knocked out too quickly to feel the injury, but after waking up months later he'd had lingering back pain. A few of his nerves even had to be replaced to ensure he wasn't paralyzed, "I guess 'after the war' was just never something I figured I'd make it to, you know?"

Poe nodded in understanding. "Well, you still have time to figure it out," he said enthusiastically. "Someone as lucky as you is definitely going to live to see the end of the war and you'll have the whole rest of your life to figure out what you want to do with it."

Finn felt a smile creep on his face. He was still unsure what he wanted to do after the war, but the thought of having the time to figure it out, not having to worry about this clock in his head constantly ticking down, telling him to move or die, it was a nice thought. Poe was good at making Finn see the brighter sides of things. "Thanks man," he said, placing a hand on Poe's shoulder. "What about you? Any future plans for the Resistance's ace pilot?"

Poe smiled and shrugged. "A few ideas. Maybe I'll get into politics like the General. Maybe I'll become a stunt flyer. Maybe I'll be able to just retire and kick back on Dantooine or something. I

got a few options.”

“Well that’s good,” Finn said. “Just make sure you stay alive long enough to pick one, okay?”

“Well, if the battle over D’Qar is any indication, there’s two girls who are determined not to let me die,” Poe laughed cynically, “If they weren’t gay I’d swear they were into me.”

“Someone is full of themselves,” Finn said with a cheeky smirk.

“Says the guy still in love with a gay woman,” Poe shot back.

Finn immediately frowned. “Low blow, man.”

“I’m kidding,” Poe said. “You know she cares about you.”

“Yeah, I know. And believe me, that’s enough,” Finn insisted. “It’s just sometimes I can’t help but think... ‘what if’ you know?”

“Yeah, I think I get ya,” Poe smiled, “Everything happened while you were out. Didn’t you say Rey was furious with Amorosa the last time you saw her or something?”

“Yeah, Rey was the last person to find out that Aliana was Sith,” Finn explained. “Apparently the idea of Rey being the one to think less of her for who she is scared her. Being a Stormtrooper, I guess I could sympathize with that.”

“So, you think if you hadn’t taken the lightsaber to the back, things might have been different?” Poe asked.

Finn shrugged, “Maybe.”

“Trust me, buddy. They wouldn’t have,” Poe shook his head.

Finn let out an exasperated sigh. “...I know,” he admitted. He looked over to the vibroblade he leaned against a supply crate and grasped it in his hand once more. “Well, I should get back to training,” Finn said, rising to his feet. “I’ll want a handle on the basics before Alie and Rey decide to teach me.”

Poe looked at him for a moment, before shaking his head and standing up, “Guess I should get back to work. We’re coming out of Hyperspace soon, and I’m not looking forward to being in open space again.”

Finn looked back over to Poe curiously. “Why’s that? Aren’t we coming out at the rendezvous point?”

“And that’s in open space,” Poe corrected, “A few light seconds out from Crait. Not sure why the General chose such an unsheltered location, but these days I’m not sure why the General does anything.”

A nervous expression grew on Finn’s face. “You don’t think that... that her mind’s starting to... y’know, go. Do you?” Finn remembered a time where questioning a superior’s cognitive integrity was tantamount to treason. Even as passively as he suggested it, he couldn’t help but wince slightly.

Poe shook his head, “No, the older officers are given psych evaluations regularly. If she was, we’d have noticed by now. Pretty sure it’s for reasons that only the General knows.”

Finn let out a long breath through his nose. He wanted to believe that Leia was a good leader, but her attitude towards Aliana and how that has affected both her and Rey definitely soured the General in his eyes. “...I hope she knows what she’s doing,” he said before assuming a battle stance in front of the dented training dummy.

The briefing aboard the Raddus went as well as it could. The crew members and officers were growing more antsy to get their feet on solid ground again the closer they came to their rendezvous. The reception towards the announcement of Amorosa’s and Rey’s promotion could only be described as jubilous. The functions aboard the ship from engine maintenance to group morale couldn’t have been more ideal. Amilyn had no doubt that the meeting would have gone well.

It was the conversation to come after everyone was adjourned that she was not looking forward to.

“Admiral Holdo,” Leia said, walking up to her. Amilyn knew Leia was not happy when she referred to others by their titles. “A word? Alone,” she asked, the firmness in her voice making it more a demand than a request.

“Of course, General,” Amilyn nodded. She knew this conversation was inevitable, but that hadn’t made the dread any less palpable. She followed Leia into her ready room and sat down in front of her desk, watching as Leia seemed to pace back and forth looking for what to say, “What can I do for you, General?”

Leia stopped to look at Amilyn, her expression almost comically displeased. “I would like you to enlighten me as to why I wasn’t informed about the decision to make Darth Amorosa a commander before this briefing,” she said, her voice brimming with grim undertones.

“Both Amorosa *and* Rey were made Commanders, General,” Amilyn corrected her.

Leia’s expression did not soften at this. “Rey’s promotion is not what I’m concerned about. It’s the fact that we appear to be repeating the mistakes of history and rewarding a damned Sith Lord with undeserved power and letting her influence infect the cause.”

“If I recall correctly, it was a Jedi who facilitated the destruction of the Republic,” Amilyn remarked, her expression growing cold, “A Jedi who was given undue privilege simply because he was seen as a beacon of hope for the galaxy. Sound like anyone we know? You want to talk about repeating past mistakes, Leia, look in a mirror.”

Leia’s frown turned into a sneer. “Am I to believe a member of High Command is so petty that they’d give someone a command just to spite me?” she asked, venom in her voice.

“I gave Amorosa and Rey a command over their own forces, current and potential,” Amilyn explained, clearly unamused with Leia’s tone and accusatory rhetoric, “The Jedi Order and Sith Order are our allies. Any other Jedi or Sith who join our cause will answer to them respectively. As the most experienced Force users in the fleet, they are a natural choice to lead their respective people should more of them join up.”

“And when we do win the war, what then?” she asked bitterly “Do you think the Republic won’t object to us employing Sith Lords to our cause after everything they’ve done to the Galaxy? If you

think I'm being unfair to Amorosa, you have clearly forgotten how narrow minded and self serving the Senate can be."

"It would be prudent to remind them that without Amorosa, they would have been annihilated," Holdo rolled her eyes, "And if they still won't listen, that isn't my problem. After the war, there won't need to be a Resistance, so what the Republic thinks is irrelevant."

Holdo rubbed her eyes, already growing irritated with this conversation.

"Leia, if you hate the Sith so much, why haven't you ordered her to leave?" Amilyn asked, "You're the General, and you can't banish one tiny Sith? Why are you going through all of this when you know you have the authority to force the Sith out?"

Leia let out an exasperated sigh. "Rey has got it into her head that she and Amorosa are... in love," Leia explained, visibly grimacing. "If I send Aliana away, Rey will go with her and then we've lost an important asset. Once I get Rey and the rest of High Command, present company included to see the truth of the matter," she explained rather unkindly, "then Amorosa is gone. Commander or not."

"That's an interesting plan, Leia. But if you look closer you'll notice that there's one fatal flaw with it," Holdo said calmly.

"And what is that?"

"In order for Rey and High Command to 'see the truth of the matter', Amorosa would have to start being the person you think she is," Holdo explained, "And so far, she hasn't. How exactly are you going to get Rey to believe that the woman who protected her, shielded her from a mental connection with the man who tortured her, and has cared for her since the moment they met is somehow deceiving her?"

"Darth Sidious had spent his entire career deceiving and manipulating the Republic into giving him supreme executive power," Leia countered plainly. "He tricked everyone into believing he wanted what was best for the galaxy. It was a decades long con job that the Sith have perfected to a science. Amorosa has been helpful to our cause to gain our trust. That is how the Sith work! Once we let our guards down and allow her to gain more influence and authority over the Resistance, she is going to be very different. Once there is no one left to check her power, her true colors will show. Mark my words, Holdo."

"Oh enough with this hidden agenda, Leia!" Amilyn snapped, standing up, "Amorosa isn't some decrepit politician making a power grab! She's a drifter who got caught up in here by circumstance and if we cut her loose the First Order would have a dozen Star Destroyers pursuing her to the edges of the galaxy! You'd really send her out to die based on suspicion?!"

"I will not object to guaranteed evil destroying itself," Leia said, malice dripping in her casual tone.

"Guaranteed evil? She's just a kid!" Amilyn yelled, "A kid who has done NOTHING to you!"

"She's a SITH!" Leia shot back. "A practitioner of the Dark Side. Force users who subject others to death and misery for their own gain. They are always consumed with an insatiable hunger for power and will kill billions of people to try and satiate that hunger. That has always been their way. That will always be their way. You may be willing to ignore that fact in favor of welcoming a convenient short term asset, but I'm not. Even if Amorosa isn't that person yet, her commitment to the Dark Side will make her that person. That's what always happens."

“If you’re so certain that people who use the Dark Side are untrustworthy, then answer me this,” Holdo glared, “Why are you so determined to bring Kylo Ren back to the Light?”

Leia felt her breath catch in her throat at Amilyn’s question. A part of her wanted to simply leave the ready room and not dignify the Admiral with a response. No, that wouldn’t do. She had to say her piece. She would not let someone else have the last word.

“I know my son,” she began. “Ben never sought out the Dark Side. He was pulled into it by Snoke. Ben has never done anything for the First Order without being conflicted. I know it. There is still Light in him. We just need someone else strong in the Force to guide him back. He is confused and unsure about his place in the world. Amorosa is not.”

“Leia, your son tried to murder billions of people,” Amilyn said, her tone cold and quiet.

“That was Snoke.”

“Fine, I’ll walk with you to that pier,” Amilyn shook her head, “What about what he did to Rey? He kidnapped her, tortured her, and violated her. He then tried to murder her friends and her as well. He has used the Force to relentlessly pursue and torment her in a way that can only be described as predatory.”

For a beat the general was silent. “And she was able to challenge him,” she said finally. “She’s his equal in the Force and has what we need to make Ben see the error of his ways. If we can find a way to use the bond to get a message out to him, we can bring him to the Light and rob the First Order of the prized weapon they tried to make him to be.”

“...She may have challenged him, but that doesn’t change what he did to her,” Amilyn said coldly, “And frankly, I find it disgusting that you would try to use her as bait like this just on the *possibility* of your son turning his back on the First Order. That you would seek to tear her away from someone who is truly making her happy for the sake of that monster!”

Leia’s eyes narrowed at Amilyn. “If you are accusing me of being biased about this, Admiral, then you are officially out of line,” she said, her voice low and harsh.

“I’m not speaking as an Admiral, Leia. I’m speaking as your friend,” Amilyn said, standing up and meeting Leia’s harsh glare, “I’ll concede that there’s a chance Solo could be turned back to the Light. But it is monstrously unfair for you to expect Rey to be the one to facilitate that. It is not her responsibility to reach out to a man who has tortured her so badly she’s still having nightmares about it. Amorosa won’t let you use her like that, and neither will I.”

Amilyn’s words were firm and her gaze unfaltering. Any retort Leia had died in her throat when she realized that anything else she had to say would just be her repeating herself. She had forgotten how difficult it was to debate with Holdo when she really got going. It was part of the reason she placed her in such a high command. She was sharp, decisive and pragmatic. And now all of those virtues were being used against Leia.

A part of her wanted to agree with Amilyn. To admit to herself once and for all that her son was lost forever and that Amorosa truly had Rey’s and the Resistance’s best interests in mind. That started to make sense to her as Amilyn laid it out in front of her.

But there was another, much louder voice in her mind screaming at her that all of this was wrong. No rhyme or reason to this voice, just a viscerele gut feeling. It was a voice she had grown

accustomed to listening to in times of war, when justice needed to be exacted in the galaxy. It was comfortable for her to listen to that voice.

So she did.

“So be it, but I cannot allow you or Amorosa to pull this Resistance into the darkness any further. From here on out, any decision regarding that Sith goes through me or it doesn’t happen. If she truly wants what’s best for us and for Rey, she is going to spend a good long time proving it.”

Amilyn knew this wouldn’t go uncontested. Amorosa had too much support in High Command. But at the very least the warning was given, and any consequences Leia suffered for pushing her or Rey were consequences she has fully accepted.

“Just one more thing,” Amilyn said as she prepared to leave. She pulled a small holopad out of her pocket and set it on Leia’s desk, “Amorosa surrendered the security logs of the Fury when High Command requested them from her. And among them was this moment that stuck out. I think it’s something that you need to see.”

With that, she turned and left, giving Leia no more regard.

Leia looked at the holopad with interest. A security log? Perhaps there was some valuable information. Holdo wouldn’t have given it to her otherwise. With her curiosity piqued, she turned the holopad on, playing the log that was loaded onto it.

She saw a projection of herself and Amorosa, clearly taken from their holocall months ago.

“-Is there anything else you need, General?” Amorosa’s image said coldly.

“Well now that you mention it-”

“Good,” Amorosa shut off the holoterminal and sat down on her bed, fuming.

Leia was pleased to see Amorosa angry at the conversation, until the image took a turn for the worse. She watched in surprise as the Sith curled her legs up to her chest and sat against the back wall, resting her head in her arms. And then, Leia heard the unmistakable strained gasps for air...

The Sith was crying.

Leia was at a loss for words. The sight before her was unreal. She couldn’t imagine someone like Amorosa crying. The very thought struck her as odd. Yet here was the girl, curled into a ball, weeping by herself with no audience to deceive. What was worse was that as she watched, her could recall the conversation that immediately preceded this moment. Where Leia had told the Sith that she hoped Rey would someday kill her. At the moment she didn’t think Amorosa would think twice about this kind of threat. Seeing this now, however, she knew that she was very wrong.

She watched as the image on the holopad changed to what looked like the Fury’s living area, with Amorosa and a droid near a workbench.

“Miss Alie, you must know that Miss Rey would never follow such an order.”

“Would she?” Aliana asked as the droid put a hand on her shoulder, “She’s been so distant lately... maybe she would. She’s a Jedi... killing Sith is their specialty. Especially learning from Skywalker...”

Leia felt a pit forming in her stomach. Even through the filter of static she could feel the sorrow and fear in the young woman's voice. She sounded so genuinely meek and hopeless as she talked to her droid. Suddenly Leia could feel doubt filling her mind.

"...I see," she said aloud to no one.

She switched off the holopad, unable to watch anymore. She wanted to deny it. Throw it in a drawer and never think about it again. But... it was right there in front of her face. Leia's words had seriously hurt the Sith, and from the looks of the holopad's capacity she had been hurt for a while.

She sat back in her chair and stared down at the inactive pad, "What have I done..."

Chapter End Notes

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A Price, A Weakness

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Leia sat at her desk, mulling over what she'd just seen. It had only been a snippet of the security holos, but the briefest of glances into how Amorosa behaved when she was alone or with her droid had contradicted everything she knew about the Sith. And this time, she couldn't ignore it when it was staring her directly in the face. How a Sith who had put on such a cold presence on D'Qar could be so easily reduced to tears was beyond her, and now she had to contend with the unknown.

Had this been a brief tangent, or was this how Amorosa truly was around the people she trusted? Leia needed answers, and there was only one place she was going to get them.

Amorosa herself.

"It's still weird," Aliana said, her lips pursed in slight discomfort.

Rey had to resist the urge to roll her eyes. "Alie, if the mattress is really that uncomfortable-"

"It's not that it's uncomfortable," Aliana clarified as she laid upon the bed in their quarters together. "It just... feels different. It's not what I'm used to and my brain refuses to let it go."

Rey stood at the foot of the bed and extended both arms to gesture to it. "It's a bed! Just like any other."

"The bed on the Fury was different than this!" Aliana insisted. "I know what that bed felt like, and it doesn't feel like this."

"I never thought you'd be so picky about something this small," Rey sighed with exasperation. "You know beds on Jakku were very much a 'make do' arrangement."

Aliana lifted her head to look at Rey and counter when they heard a low beep meant to indicate that there was someone at the door.

"Amorosa?" the two heard Leia call out from the other side.

"Well there goes the kriffing day," Aliana scoffed as she got up to press the intercom, "What do you want, General?" she asked, making no attempt to hide her displeasure at Leia's interruption.

"I need to talk to you," Leia said. "Alone if you can."

Rey frowned and walked over to the intercom with Aliana. "General, whatever you need to say to Aliana you can say to me. I'm not going to let you threaten her outside my presence anymore."

"I didn't come with the intention to threaten her," Leia responded.

"It's alright, sweetheart. I got this," Aliana smiled at Rey and kissed her cheek as she turned back to the intercom, "I'll be right out, General. Just let me get a cloak. Your ship is freezing."

She withdrew from the intercom and retrieved her cloak and tied it around her shoulders. Flicking her hand at the door, it opened to show the General standing outside. Taking a deep breath before she turned to face her, she took Rey by the shoulders and kissed her goodbye before finally bothering to address Leia in any capacity.

“Alright, let’s go get this over with,” she said begrudgingly.

Leia said nothing at first and instead turned to walk down the corridor, gesturing for Aliana to follow. With great reluctance, Aliana tailed after her. The two walked for a moment before stopping at an empty passageway. There was a transparisteel paneling on the side of the wall allowing the two of them to see the ripples of hyperspace as they traveled.

“I want to talk about our last discussion,” Leia said finally. “And what happened afterwards.”

“You mean when you wished that my girlfriend would murder me?” Aliana asked bitterly.

“...Yes, that,” she admitted. “It wasn’t my best moment I’ll admit. I just... I never considered the possibility that you would be... bothered by my words. That you’d just scoff at them as an empty threat and just move on. I hadn’t considered that they would affect you in any way.”

Aliana narrowed her eyes, “What do you mean, affect me?” she asked suspiciously.

Leia sighed, deciding she may as well be completely honest about the situation. “Admiral Holdo gave me the security logs from your ship. I saw the recording of our conversation... and what happened after it.”

Aliana huffed indignantly, “Holdo promised the security logs would only be accessed if necessary,” she said as she rubbed her eyes. “Whatever. So you saw me break down, is that it?”

“Yes and I want to know why,” Leia responded. “Why did what I say cause you to break down. Sith aren’t supposed to come undone like that by just words. Why was this different?”

Aliana debated whether or not she should tell her, or just leave and return to her quarters. Rey was there, and certainly much nicer company than Leia. But then she thought back to her conversation with Luke after receiving her mother’s lightsaber. If it would get the General off her back...

“I never told Rey that I was a Sith when I met her. I was afraid she would react the same way you do,” Aliana explained, glancing out the window, “She found out on her own and she was furious with me for lying to her. Said she couldn’t be sure if anything I said to her was true. So she didn’t trust me anymore. She told me I’d have to earn that trust back by being completely honest with her.”

She turned to face the window completely, doing her best to keep Leia out of her field of vision, “I was trying, but Rey remained so distant with me that it was almost impossible. She’d only approach me if she needed supplies or information about the Force, or if your son was digging around in her brain. All other times, she barely spoke to me. So I didn’t really put it past her to follow through on your threat. She’s a Jedi, she’s being trained by Luke Skywalker, and it wouldn’t be the first time Skywalker trained someone to attack unprovoked.”

Leia grit her teeth, displeased where Aliana was taking the conversation. “I’m not here to talk about my son, whatever he’s done as Kylo Ren isn’t relevant t-”

“I’m not talking about that!” Aliana interjected harshly. “I’m talking about what he and Skywalker did to me years ago!”

Leia blinked, not expecting such a harsh and emotional response out of the blue like that. “...What did they do?”

Aliana leered at Leia for a moment before fussing to pull down the collar of her robe. Along the length of her shoulder and upper arm was a long scar faded slightly from time but still clearly visible. “PADAWAN Ben Solo gave me this while Master Skywalker cut down my mother,” she snarled at Leia. “She was training me on Corellia when those two ambushed us unprovoked. I only got out alive because my mother devoted so much of her power to protect me. As I fled I saw them burn my mother's body. They did that all because they were afraid. They didn’t see a mother and child. All they saw were two Sith who they decided needed to die. THAT is why your threat struck me so hard. Because it’s happened before.”

Leia stared at Aliana’s scar in disbelief. There was no way Ben had done this at Luke’s behest. It was... impossible.

“Are you sure that-”

“Luke confirmed it to Rey and then to me when he returned my mother’s lightsaber to me two weeks ago,” Aliana cut across her, “Kylo Ren taunted Rey with that information before I blocked their connection. I grew up without my mother because of this kind of attitude. I grew up terrified of Jedi because of this kind of attitude. And when you made that threat, I was alone on a planet with two Jedi, both of whom didn’t trust me in the slightest and who had a lot of respect for you. So yeah, I feared for my life when you said that to me.”

Leia felt her mouth go dry as Aliana continued. The girl’s words rung with emotions that were impossible to imitate through deception. Her presence through the Force did not appear to be concealing anything. Aliana was telling the truth. She was deeply wounded by Jedi in the past, and Leia had decided to put pressure on that wound simply out of anger and paranoia. “I see...” she said barely above a whisper.

“Trust me, Organa. I don’t want to be here any more than you want me here,” Aliana seethed, “I’m here for Rey, not your cause. If it weren’t for her, I’d be content to watch you and the First Order kill each other.”

Leia exhaled slowly through her nose. Her mind rattled for anything else to say to Aliana without sounding any more monstrous to the girl than she already had.

“...So as long as Rey stays and fights for us, you will too?” she asked.

“Yes,” Aliana nodded, “I let her go and didn’t follow once before, and that ended with her being captured and tortured by your son. I will *never* let that happen again.”

A beat of silence, where the two could only hear the gentle hum of the ship all around them.

“...Alright,” Leia said with a nod. “I believe you.”

Aliana finally looked at Leia with one of the most surprised expressions she had ever had in her life. She hadn’t expected Leia to concede. She’d expected her to make more wild accusations of

deception and being some kind of twisted double-agent. All the retorts she'd prepared died as she stared at the General, "...Say what?"

"Either you are capable of a level of deception that surpasses Darth Sidious himself," Leia said. "Or you're just a kid who's willing to do anything for one of the few people you have in your life. Considering all you've done for her, and for us at this point, I think I'm willing to accept the latter as truth."

Aliana was speechless. Was she imagining this? Was the General finally going to get off her back? She turned to stare back out the window and pressed her fingers to her eyes, "...I *would* do anything for her..." she said quietly.

"And I believe you now," Leia said. "I still don't like the fact that you're here, but I know that you aren't a threat to us." Another pause as she internally debated what she would say next. "And I... apologize for the threats. That was unprofessional of me."

"...Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why don't you like the fact that I'm here?" Aliana asked, still staring out the window.

"Because I don't like Sith," Leia said plainly. "You being a decent person doesn't change that, but I can at least be civil from now on."

"Well that makes two of us, because I don't like Jedi," Aliana said, "...Well, I like one Jedi."

"Well she certainly likes you," Leia said with a wry smile. "I thought she was going to fight me for your honor in the war room the other day."

"Really? She never mentioned it aside from saying she lectured you," Aliana shrugged, "What happened?"

"I told her that you weren't to be trusted and she..." Leia winced as the memory came back to her. "...well there's really no other way to put it, she lectured me about how wonderful you are and how terrible my son is. It got uncomfortably personal, if I'm being honest."

Aliana smiled at the knowledge that Rey had defended her. Called her wonderful.

"Unfortunately, any conversation that includes Kylo Ren is going to be personal, General," Aliana's smile slowly faded, "You might think there's good left in your son, but he's been part of some extremely painful memories for the both of us. And you can't keep ignoring that."

"I... understand," Leia said, her gaze lowered to the floor. "...Ben has hurt you both in a way that I cannot reconcile. Should it come down to it..." she fell quiet again, swallowing the lump in her throat. "You both can do what you must."

Aliana looked back to Leia and for the first time felt a pang of sympathy for what must have been a grieving mother, "For what it's worth, I gave him the chance to surrender on two different occasions."

"...I'm sure you did," Leia responded, any tone of sarcasm surprisingly bereft from her voice. Her gaze turned back to the window before she regarded Aliana again. "I've taken up enough of your

time. You'll probably want to get back to Rey. We'll be dropping out of Hyperspace soon and I imagine you'll want to spend some time on your ship."

"I do miss Rey, and my droid," Aliana nodded, as she turned away to return to her quarters, "And... thank you, General."

"Don't mention it," Leia said with a smile. "May the Force be with you."

"May the Force serve you well."

Aliana was relieved when the doors to the hangar unsealed as the Raddus dropped out of Hyperspace. She ran between the haphazardly parked X-Wing and old Republic starfighters until the towering silhouette of the Fury was finally in view. The Falcon was parked right beside it, and Aliana took a great deal of pride in the fact that the Fury was a much larger, more heavily armed ship than the broken freighter.

"Oh I missed you!" she smiled as she ran her hand over the Fury's hull, "I officially hate Hyperspace now!"

Rey let out a haughty smile as she jogged after Aliana. She found the Sith so adorable when she was like this. "Feeling homesick, sweetie?" she asked upon catching up to Aliana.

Aliana turned and smiled at her girlfriend, "Not anymore," she purred as she squeezed her hand.

A feeling of giddiness fluttered in Rey's chest as she accepted the hand into her own. A thought crossed her mind, prompting her to give a cheeky smile to Aliana. "Does this mean we're back to sleeping in separate beds?" she asked.

"I mean... I wouldn't say no to you just moving into my quarters," Aliana smiled, kissing Rey's cheek, "You're more than welcome to."

"I figured as much," Rey said with a smile. "I was just teasing." With that, she reaffirmed her grip on Aliana's hand as the two made their way back inside the Fury. As they stepped inside through the airlock they noticed the interior was as pristine and orderly as ever. In the center of this impeccably clean main room was 2V-R8.

"Alie! Miss Rey!" he greeted fondly. "It's good to see you both again! I wasn't sure how long I could remain functioning all by myself with the critter!"

As if on cue, the Porg fell from a beam upon the ship's ceiling right onto 2V's head. It squawked cheerfully, like it was playing a game.

"Oh I missed both of you!" Aliana exclaimed as she took the Porg off of 2V's head and pulled 2V himself into a hug, "Never let me spend Hyperspace on a cruiser again!"

"I will do my best to adhere to that order, Alie," 2V acknowledged. "I hope you and Miss Rey weren't in too much distress aboard the cruiser."

The Porg made a sympathetic noise, as if agreeing with 2V as it nuzzled into Aliana. Aliana kissed the top of the critter's head and smiled at him, "I still need to think of a name for you," she said as she set him to nestle in her hood. It was only when he stopped jostling and settled down that she

felt a wave of anxiety and pure, unbridled danger wash over her. As if they were moments away from lethal harm.

Panicking, she hit the comm button to signal the bridge, “Fury to Raddus! Shields up!”

Rey was about to ask what was wrong before the feeling of incoming danger flooded over her as well. Wanting to waste no time, she dashed into the cockpit of the Fury. “2V! Help me prep this thing for launch!”

“At once, Miss Rey!” he said in a cheerful tone, the sense of doom not registering to his personality core.

Aliana ran to the short-range comm station and signalled for Poe and Finn, “Poe! Come in! I need you to scramble every fighter in the hanger immediately!”

“Why? What’s wro- OH KRIFF!” Poe shouted before the comm cut out.

Through the viewport, Rey could see out the hanger door to see several ships suddenly drop out of hyperspace. Almost half a dozen Star Destroyers came into view. The First Order had found them. And that was before a massive ship with a wingspan the length of the entire First Order fleet jumped in, making the sense of doom turn into despair.

The Fury was already out of the hangar as the pilots were still scrambling to their ships. The advance warning was worth it as not only had the fleet started firing immediately, but three fighters had torn out of the massive dreadnought and were speeding toward the Raddus.

“2V, get High Command on holo,” Rey said as she veered the ship around to intercept, “I need to know what’s happening on the bridge!”

“Right away, Miss Rey,” 2V said before pressing a series of buttons to open a holo channel.

“This is Resistance ship Raddus to the Fury,” Amilyn said over the holo. “I wish to thank Aliana for the warning. Our shields are up and our fighters are scrambling to meet you as we speak. What’s the situation out there?”

“About thirteen Star Destroyers and a ship the size of a small city,” Rey explained as Aliana jumped into the captain’s chair, “And also a strike force headed for... THE PORTSIDE HANGER KRIFF!”

“Understood!” Holdo said. “Please intercept if you can! We almost have the fighters ready. Holdo out!” With that the comm channel was closed, leaving the crew of three with their orders.

2V looked out the viewport at the massive ship all but eclipsing the Star Destroyers. “Resistance records say that is the Supremacy. Flagship of the First Order! It seems they have given the Resistance their undivided attention for this.”

“Well that’ll complicate things,” Aliana huffed, “Keep the comms open, I don’t want to have to mess with it during interception.”

She turned her attention to the fighters Rey was moving to intercept. They were two TIE fighters and a TIE Silencer, a specialized quick-strike ship that had heavy weapons but little ammunition.

This was very much a “get in, get out” kind of assault. She grinned as she realized how much those kinds of assaults required flawless circumstances.

“2V, fire to make them break formation,” she ordered, “Don’t let them get to the hangar intake!”

“At once, Alie!” 2V said before aiming the weapons at the TIE squad and opening fire. Sure enough the fighters broke formation, causing the Interceptor to miss its mark. The hull of the ship withstood a powerful strike, but held strong.”

The Fighters meanwhile turned to face the Fury, opening fire upon them. Rey steered hard to the right, pulling the ship out of the way. The Fighters remained in pursuit of them as four more fighters began flying towards the Raddus to support the interceptor.

“We could use some help out here!” Aliana shouted over the comms.

“A please wouldn’t kill you,” Poe said in jest. “Don’t worry, help is on the way.” His words were followed by over half a dozen fighters flying out the Raddus’ hanger to engage the enemy TIEs.

The tiny strike force broke off almost immediately at the sign of heavy resistance, but the Silencer seemed to be trying desperately to swing around to take another run at the hangar. Aliana and Rey looked at each other in confusion, before realization dawned on them.

“Grease stain?” Aliana asked.

“Grease stain,” Rey nodded.

The two women grimaced in unison before Rey accelerated the thrusters to catch up with the Interceptor.

Kylo Ren’s Force augmentation allowed him to evade the fire of the nearby X wings, but the manner in which they swarmed him kept him from getting a clean shot on the hangar once again. Aliana could feel the frustration emanating from the interceptor as they got closer.

“Nowhere to run this time,” she said with a smirk as Rey pulled the Fury into a pursuit. Kylo Ren’s silencer turned and made for a run to the bow of the Raddus, clearly going for the bridge. At this range, the shields wouldn’t have been effective and he could blast the entire Resistance leadership out into space.

“Poe, come around with me to the bow!” Rey yelled into the comms, “The rest of the fighters should keep any advancing forces at bay!”

“On my way! Red squadron! Stay frosty! I’ll be right back!” Poe said over the channel and rushed towards the Raddus at top speed.

“Holdo, you hear me!?” Aliana shouted. “You have an interceptor making its way to the bridge. You have to evacuate until we can dispose of it!”

“We can’t do that,” Amilyn said regrettably. “We have to coordinate with the rest of the fleet.”

“Oh for the love of-” Aliana reached her hand out and locked eyes with the speaker that Amilyn’s voice was coming from, “You will evacuate the bridge immediately.”

“...I will evacuate the bridge immediately,” Holdo said in an oddly monotone voice.

Rey's head whipped around to look at Aliana with an expression of surprise. "Did you just-?"

"Desperate times call for desperate measures," Aliana shrugged, "Can't coordinate the fleet if she's dead."

Rey shrugged and turned her gaze back to the viewport. The interceptor in front of them was dangerously close to lining up its shot. 2V fired the Fury's weapons upon it, but it managed to swerve and weave clear of the shots without losing sight of its target. "Well we can ascertain that he is at least a better pilot than he is a swordsman," 2V remarked plainly.

Aliana bit her lip in anxiety as she saw the scene play out in front of her. She could sense that the High Command was not entirely off the bridge. Some members were likely protesting Holdo's 'wishes' to evacuate, which only gave Kylo Ren more time to wipe them all out in one fell swoop. The precious seconds were counting down. Aliana extended a hand to try and stall Kylo through the force when a series of laser shots knocked into the Dark Jedi's interceptor, taking him off course.

"Not today, pal!" Poe said over the comm.

Aliana sighed and sat back in her chair, her heart pounding in her chest, "Poe, you are a life-saver!" she exclaimed as she motioned for Rey to fly at her own discretion.

"Someone's gotta pick up your slack," came Poe's voice over the comm.

"Don't get cocky, we're still outnumbered," Aliana laughed as she sat up straight, "Holdo, Organa, what's your status?"

"We're outside the bridge," Holdo said, the increased garbling in her voice suggesting that she was transmitting to her personal holocom rather than the bridge terminal. "I suppose you made the right call after all, Amorosa."

"A second too late and you'd have all been vented into space," Aliana said as Rey brought the ship around to face the fleet, "Looks like they're scrambling more fighters. Can we get any more guns? Or something?"

"We aren't exactly a war fleet, but some of our cruisers are outfitted with turbolasers," Holdo noted. "We'll have them give you some cover fire. I don't suppose there are any more Force tricks you two have that the First Order hasn't seen yet?"

"Uh... I have one, but it'll kill us all if we don't do it properly," Aliana winced, looking at the fleet holo, "Poe? You got anything? Can't we jump out or something?"

"They were right on top of us when we dropped out of lightspeed!" Poe said as he swerved through a squadron of TIE fighters. "Whatever they did, they'll just do it again if we jump. We gotta come up with a new plan!"

"The mass of the Star Destroyers as well as the Supremacy does give our thrusters a speed advantage," 2V noted. "So long as the fleet stays out of range of their turbo lasers, they cannot give their fighters cover fire. That would lower our risk of immediate destruction."

Rey furrowed her brow as she gave the strategy. "...It's a stall tactic at best, but it would buy us some time to come up with a new plan."

“Alright, I’m in,” Aliana shook her head, “Poe, what do you think?”

“I don’t have nothing else so might as well regroup,” came Poe’s voice, “You and I guard the ship until it’s out of range, the rest of you get docked ASAP.”

“Copy that Red leader!”

The squadrons disengaged from the battle and retreated to their cruisers as fast as they could. The TIE fighters remained in pursuit until they were met with heavy fire coming from the Fury’s main guns. They broke formation and tried to veer hard into one of the ancient interceptors blind spots, but Poe was quick to cut off their intended sneak attack.

The Fury and Poe’s fighter weaved around each other, each covering blind spots as they came down hard on the enemy fighters like pincers. Ordinarily the Fury was augmented by the Force to make tight turns, but Rey’s piloting was good enough that Aliana could focus her abilities on redirecting enemy fire and confusing pilots. Between Her, Rey, 2V, Poe and BB-8 they proved to be extremely lethal.

In the back of her mind, Aliana was thinking that Poe should probably have a warship to fly.

The remaining fighters broke away and flew back to the First Order fleet. The lack of turbolaser fire suggested that the Resistance was officially out of their range.

“OK, we’ve reached a safe distance,” Holdo said on the open channel. “Now the two of you haul ass back to the Raddus right now.”

“Don’t have to tell us twice, Admiral,” Rey said, veering away from the First Order fleet and towards the Resistance flagship. “Do we need to drag you back with our mind again, Poe?”

“Not this time, commander,” Poe said, hoping his shuddering did not come through on the comm.

“How is it that with all of this, we can’t take out three small cruisers and a corvette that’s older than most governments?!” Hux asked angrily as he watched the Raddus pull out of range.

“They’re faster and lighter, sir,” the Admiral in control of the ship said as he watched alongside the General, “As long as they keep out of range, we can’t break down their shields.”

Hux sneered to himself before his lip curled upward in a wicked smirk. “Perhaps not, but they still cannot hope to escape us in hyperspace, and our fuel reserves are far greater. We’ll just have to bleed them dry and pick them off one by one in the interim.”

His smirk fell when he heard the unmistakable sound of durasteel buckling and what sounded like the squealing of a wounded manka cat just outside the bridge.

“And perhaps somebody should muzzle the Supreme Leader’s dog,” he huffed as he watched the Sith corvette dock inside the Raddus.

His brow furrowed as his thoughts drifted to the Dark Lady inside that ship. Whether anyone was willing to admit it or not, that Sith was perhaps their biggest roadblock to complete galactic domination. He wouldn’t have believed that it was Darth Amorosa alone who stopped the Starkiller Base from destroying the Hosnian system if Snoke hadn’t said as much. Such raw power on the

side of their enemies made him more than a little frightened even if he would never admit it to anyone. That coupled with the scavenger that was able to best Kylo on Starkiller base meant their conquest was in trouble.

Hux knew these two couldn't be stopped with brute force alone, but the Sith? Perhaps she could be bargained with. All they needed was a bargaining chip of some kind. A piece of intel they could use to bring her into their favor.

"Admiral, what intel do we have on the Sith Lord currently allied with the Resistance?" he asked as he watched the Raddus continue to pull further and further away.

"Not much, sir," the Admiral shook his head, "Lord Ren has so far only encountered her twice and couldn't remain cordial enough the first time to learn much. Only that she is heavily armed, was a solitary drifter before appearing on our radar, and prefers the company of other women."

"Prefers the-" Hux paused as the meaning of those words dawned on him. "Oh... so she's one of those... people... fantastic," he said, his voice dripping with sarcasm.

"It appears so, sir," the Admiral nodded, "That is all the intel we could acquire. Short of opening communications with the Sith herself, it is unlikely we will gain anything else from her. Perhaps Lord Ren's mind probe, but that would require capturing the woman."

"Keep digging for intel whilst we wait for the first stragglers to fall behind." Hux said firmly before turning to step off from the bridge. "There must be something else we could gather about this woman," he muttered to himself. "A price. A weakness. Anything."

He would not simply sit back and throw a tantrum over this woman like Kylo Ren so frequently did. This was a problem, but a problem he was going to solve. He took an approach he did not frequently enjoy taking and headed for the turbolift to the Supremacy's throne room. It was not often he would approach the Supreme Leader asking for assistance, but in the interest of completing the mission as quickly as possible he would be foolish not to seek the wisdom of someone powerful with the Force. He could see things from a perspective that Hux could not, after all.

As he approached the turbolift, he saw the Praetorian Guards had been replaced by Kylo Ren's far more skilled brethren, the Knights of Ren. Ap'lek and Kuruk stopped him as he approached, igniting their lightsabers threateningly.

"I must speak with the Supreme Leader immediately," Hux said, bowing at the waist, "I require his wisdom."

The two knights exchanged looks that were unreadable through their masks before deactivating their lightsabers and parting to let Hux pass. The general nodded politely and then proceeded into the throne room. As he entered, Snoke's eyes were on him almost immediately. Not a surprise. The Supreme Leader could sense the presence of everyone aboard the Supremacy. No one could truly surprise him with their arrival. He would always expect them.

Hux stopped a good 10 meters in front of Snoke before taking a knee. "Supreme Leader," he greeted.

"General Hux," Snoke drawled as he stared the man down, "Am I to assume you have good reason for disturbing me?"

“I came seeking your guidance,” Hux said plainly. “Our pursuit of the Resistance leadership remains ongoing, but the Sith has been giving us a fair share of trouble. We... We aren't sure what to do about her. She has proven far more powerful and capable than we could have accounted for. She single handedly thwarted out attempts to cripple the Republic on Starkiller Base. She effortlessly defeats Kylo Ren at every possible opportunity. We can't even seem to stop her with an entire fleet at our command. ...She can't be invincible. She must have some sort of vulnerability, but we cannot find it. Surely you, in all your wisdom and power, should know what it is.”

“The Sith hasn't been the solitary thorn in your side you believe her to be, General,” Snoke said slowly, showing more patience as Amorosa had up to this point proven to elude him as well, “Her friends have been just as crucial in disrupting our operations. Especially the girl and the traitor.”

Hux's frown deepened at the two that were mentioned. FN-2187 and the Scavenger. Two lesser yet impactful detriments to the First Order's plans alongside Amorosa. They both faced Kylo Ren on Starkiller base and lived to tell the tale. The Dark Jedi's incompetence was nearly common knowledge now. A bad look for their order.

“You believe these two allies of hers are the weak links in her chain?” Hux asked, hoping he understood the Supreme Leader correctly.

Snoke nodded. “Whether it's a matter of reliance or emotional attachment, if we remove them from the equation, Amorosa's power will lessen considerably. The secret truth of the Sith is how much of their strength is not their own.”

Hux finally saw what the Supreme Leader was trying to tell him. FN-2187 had inside knowledge that was invaluable to anybody, but especially to the Sith. The scavenger, he'd been told, was far stronger in the force than Amorosa, only untrained and clumsy. Either one would be a severe blow to the Resistance as a whole, not just the Sith. In order to strike a decisive blow, he would need to take at least one of them out.

“Which of her friends would you target, Supreme Leader?” Hux asked, curious for his input.

The voice that spoke up was not the Supreme Leader's, but Kylo Ren. Up until this point, he had been kneeling beside Snoke's throne, quietly fuming to himself.

“The girl,” he said, “The Sith is in love with her.”

Snoke tilted his malformed head in Kylo Ren's direction. “Are you certain?” he asked dryly.

“Yes,” Kylo responded, trying not to tremble under the harsh gaze of the Supreme Leader. “I'd bet my life on it.”

After a beat of silence, the scowl on Snoke's face turned into a wicked smile. “Well then, that settles that. Sith draw their power from their passions. Destroy the girl and Amorosa's power will be null and void.”

Hux's brow furrowed in confusion. “Would destroying the Scavenger not set the Sith into a rage?” he asked.

“Perhaps, but such outrages are predictable, fleeting and easy to counter,” Snoke replied. “Of course, we may not need to destroy her. Once the girl is brought to me, I will be able to mold her

raw power into a deadly weapon for the First Order.” His gaze returned to Kylo Ren who remained kneeling before him. “The Knights of Ren could use a new leader after all.”

“Forgive me, Supreme Leader, I don’t mean to question you,” Hux bowed his head, “But wouldn’t Ren’s failures up to this point make her difficult to turn?”

“A slight complication,” Snoke admitted. “One made even greater by my apprentice’s insistence on humiliating himself. But he is not the only weapon in our arsenal. His fellow knights need only bring her to me and I will show her what true power is. If she resists still, then we shall destroy her. Either way, the Sith will lose.”

“And with the Sith, the entire Resistance along with her,” Hux smiled, “Thank you, Supreme Leader. Your wisdom has been most appreciated.”

“Of course. You are dismissed General,” Snoke said with a wave of his hand. “See to it that my wisdom is heeded.”

Hux bowed as he returned to his feet and swiftly left the room. With a clear direction in mind, he was certain that soon he would crush the Resistance once and for all.

This time.

“So we stay here, we’re dead and if we jump to lightspeed we die even faster,” Rey growled, slamming her fist on the bridge’s holoterminal, “So what do we do? Just stay here and wait for the end?”

“We aren’t dead yet,” Holdo assured Rey, placing a hand on her shoulder. “The longer we stay alive, the more time we have to come up with a plan.”

“We must act quickly!” Ackbar said. “Our fuel reserves are finite and the First Order’s pursuit will ensure we burn through as much as we can as quickly as we can.”

“I still don’t understand how they managed to find us so quickly,” Leia said quietly. “How did they manage to track us through lightspeed, then maybe... would Finn know anything about this perhaps?”

Holdo shook her head. “I’m afraid he’s already told us everything he knew about how the First Order functions, nothing he said covers this scenario.”

“I think he did mention something about how the First Order only ever scans and tracks targets through the lead ship in a fleet,” Aliana suggested, “My guess, the Supremacy?”

Rey’s eyes scanned over the fleet projected on the holoterminal, her brow furrowing pensively. “So if we can disable the Supremacy, somehow, we can escape the fleet.”

“Impossible.” Ackbar yelled in exasperation. “Trying to launch a direct assault against that fleet only guarantees our destruction.”

“And trying to run like this only prolongs our destruction!” Rey countered sharply. “We can’t stand around hoping an epiphany will come to us!”

Holdo’s gaze turned to Aliana. “Didn’t you say you had another, dangerous trick up your sleeve?”

Aliana looked down at the holoterminal, a grim expression on her face as she hit a few buttons. After a moment, what looked like a teardrop-shaped object was projected on screen.

“An old Sith technique, probably older than the Sith itself,” Aliana explained, “It’s called the Thought Bomb.”

There was a murmur throughout High Command. The Thought Bomb was known to both the Old and New Republic ever since it’s deployment on Ruusan eleven hundred years ago. It’s destructive power, as well as the suicidal nature of its use had been well documented. It was because of the Thought Bomb that the Sith had been able to hide under the guise of extinction in the first place.

Leia and Ackbar looked at each other nervously, while Holdo held her hand over her mouth.

Rey’s expression was far more composed as she looked over at Aliana. “You’ve explained the theory of the Thought Bomb to me,” she said. “Are you sure you could perform the technique?”

“Am I sure? Oh hell no!” Aliana said, shaking her head. “One slip up on my end and both fleets are annihilated, and the odds of slipping up with something like this are very high.”

Rey tried to conceal her disappointment, but nodded in understanding. “Do you think you’d be able to attempt it if it was our last resort?” she continued.

Aliana bit her lip nervously. “...I mean, if the options are either die or take out the First Order while also possibly dying, then I guess we’d have nothing to lose.”

“Let’s keep that firmly under last resort then,” Leia said firmly. “In the meantime, I want every ship in the fleet to optimize their fuel reserves. Divert as much power as possible to thrusters and shields. Keep all fighters and transports in their hangars unless ordered otherwise.”

As High Command dispersed, Aliana pulled Rey and Poe aside to a far corner of the bridge.

“Finn knows First Order ship layouts, right?” Aliana asked, “You think if we managed to get into the ship undetected, he and Rose could sabotage the Supremacy?”

Rey and Poe looked at each other before looking back at Aliana. “...Probably,” Poe said. “But the getting onto the ship undetected part is a hell of a hurdle to leap right now.”

“Let’s meet down in the engines. I have a feeling there may be a less explosive way out of this situation,” Aliana nodded, “And... don’t tell High Command. I don’t want to get hopes up without a certainty that we can pull this off.”

“It does make sense,” Rose said as she paced back and forth on the engine room. “Whether it’s through normal space or Hyperspace, the principle of tracking is still the same. There has to be a receptor that tracks the targets movements. If that receptor is anywhere, it’s on the flagship.”

“I know my way around First Order ships,” Finn nodded confidently. “I could get us to where the tracker is located... but...” he trailed off, deflating considerably.

“But?” Rey asked.

“Without the latest docking codes, which are changed in regular intervals, there’s no way we’re getting on that ship,” Finn admitted with a heavy sigh.

“Couldn’t we just fight through the ship and kill anyone who gets in our way?” Aliana asked nonchalantly.

Everyone turned to Aliana, eyebrows raised at the sheer audacity of the Sith to suggest storming what amounted to the First Order’s Capital.

“What? We stormed bigger,” Aliana shrugged.

“I mean... we may be able to fight our way through the ship, but that doesn’t change the fact that the fleet will blow us into Space Dust before we even reach the Supremacy.”

“Can’t either of you just cloak our ship with the Force or something?” Poe asked Aliana and Rey. “Like you did with the Falcon on Starkiller base?”

“Force cloaking techniques only work to conceal you from Force sensitives,” Rey said with a grimace. “It doesn’t work against scanners or plain sight.”

“If I knew enough about their scanners, I could theoretically use the Force to interfere with them,” Aliana suggested, “Of course, the problem is-”

“You can’t even open a fuel converter by yourself,” Rey smirked.

“...Yes, that.”

Poe pinched the bridge of his nose, trying to remain calm before he spoke. “OK so, if we get the access codes to board onto the Supremacy, we’ll be ok to go from there?” he asked Finn.

“Well yeah, but I don’t know what the codes are!” Finn said. “They must have changed those codes a thousand times over since I left.”

“There are people in the business of code breaking,” Aliana said, stroking her chin. “Hackers, infiltrators, spies. People who make a living knowing this stuff.”

“Do you happen to know any code breakers?” Rose asked, trying not to sound too hopeful.

“Not personally, but...” Aliana’s eyes widened as a thought came to her. “Anyone got Maz’s frequency on hand?”

“Maz is an ally, of course we have her frequency,” Poe said with a nod, “I’ll try and reach her, keep thinking of alternatives while I’m gone, though.”

“Aye Aye captain,” Aliana said with an exaggerated salute, watching Poe scoff in amusement as he walked out the door. “So we have a plan A in the works. Anyone got any ideas for a plan B yet?”

“If I could get on board discreetly, I might be able to sabotage the Supremacy’s reactor core,” Rey suggested, “With enough spanners thrown into the works, it could be set to a delayed implosion. We jump to Hyperspace just as the Supremacy explodes and they can’t start tracking up is time.”

“Dramatic, I love it.” Aliana said with a smile.

“That still doesn’t answer the question of how we get on the ship though,” Finn pointed out flatly.

“Perhaps you could hail them and say you wish to parley?” Rose suggested. “Jedi are all about keeping the peace so that shouldn’t seem too suspicious.”

“Maybe... but I’m not the best liar,” Rey admitted before turning to look at Aliana. “Honestly with all these complications, I’m becoming more in favor of the Thought Bomb plan.”

“The what?” Finn and Rose asked in unison.

“Thought Bomb, a Sith superweapon,” Aliana explained, “It’d be a risky move, but if I can pull it off now only would it disable the Destroyers and the Supremacy, it would kill everyone on board those ships and render them completely derelict.”

“Why didn’t you suggest this immediately?” Finn balked.

“It’s not reliable,” Aliana explained, “They’re hard to control, especially for one person. And whether it succeeds or fails, the Resistance will be down one Sith Lord so it won’t be usable again.”

“Wait, what!?” Rey said, eyes wide in shock as she instinctively walked over to Aliana.

“Using the Thought Bomb would kill me,” Aliana said in an eerily passive tone.

“And you didn’t think to mention that before!?” Rey demanded.

Aliana simply shrugged. “You didn’t ask.”

Rey groaned in frustration and rested her face against an open palm. “Alright, then never mind. We aren’t using the Thought Bomb. Ever.”

“I told Leia I’d do it if we had no other alternative,” Aliana said firmly, “And I will.”

“We are not going to let it get to that point!” Rey said, placing her hands on Aliana’s shoulder. “You are not going to die on me. I won’t let you.”

Aliana was quiet as she laid her hand on Rey’s arm, “It’s not like I want to. But... one casualty is better than a thousand, right?”

Rey’s hands balled into fists clinging to Aliana’s robes, clearly made viscerally uncomfortable by the conversation. “You can’t tell me that one life isn’t worth saving,” she said. “Not after all you’ve done for me.”

“No, but thousands are,” Aliana shrugged. Her seeming disinterest in the possibility of her own death was alarming not only to Rey, but to Finn and Rose as well. They’d seen people make heroic sacrifices before, but never had they seen someone act like it was just taking out the trash.

“Alie...” Rey said, her expression pained while she moved her hands to cup Aliana’s cheeks. She found herself at a complete loss for words, unable to fathom how the Sith could be so casual of the idea of her own demise. It made tears threaten to well in her eyes.

“What?” Aliana asked, kissing Rey’s cheek, “Sith don’t live long, Rey. My mother, grandmother and great grandmother all died young. It’s just a given that the same would be true for me.”

“I... I don’t think I can handle that,” Rey admitted, her voice cracking. “I can’t let that happen to you. I won’t. That’s all there is to it.”

“Rey, I...” it was then that Aliana realized what she thought was merely pragmatism was in fact extremely alarming to the Jedi. Of course Rey wouldn’t want her to sacrifice herself. She loved her. Aliana slapped herself internally. She really had to get used to people actually wanting her around, “...I’m sorry. I... I think I’m still getting used to... this.”

Rey responded by pulling Aliana into a hug. She clung to the Sith as if she would disappear if she let go. She hid her face in Alie’s thick curly hair to conceal the single tear that fell down her cheek. “Me too,” Rey said softly.

“...I won’t create a Thought Bomb, no matter what happens,” Aliana whispered quietly, “I promise.”

“Thank you,” Rey whispered gratefully.

The two of them stood there, holding each other close. Their minds were solely on each other, having nearly forgotten the two other friends in the engine room who were sitting there somewhat awkwardly while they had their moment. Rose silently gestured to Finn, asking without words if they should say something. Finn’s gesture advised against it, letting them have this time to each other.

“I love you so much, Rey,” Aliana whispered into Rey’s ear.

“I love you too,” Rey whispered back, her fingers tightening around the Sith’s cloak as if afraid she’d drift away into space.

Poe slid into view of the group, appearing as if he ran down a series of corridors. “I got Maz on the line! Let’s-” he fell silent as he looked at Rey and Aliana embracing each other so intimately.

“...Did I miss something?” he asked.

“They’re having a moment,” Finn said, waving him down, “Just give them a little bit.”

Poe held his hands up and took a step back. Aliana and Rey didn’t seem very perturbed by his sudden entrance anyway, as they remained in each others arms. In truth it was a heartwarming sight to witness. Dameron was happy he didn’t miss it. Eventually the two broke apart, kissing softly before letting go of one another. Rey’s eyes were slightly reddened, but was smiling as Aliana stroked her hair.

“Sorry about that,” she shook her head, “Um... where were we?”

“I have Maz Kanata on the holo right now,” Poe said, pulling out his personal comm. “She said she can help us.”

The comm lit up with a soft blue light as an image began to form. Soon the group saw Maz holding a blaster rifle shooting at someone out of sight.

“Hello again, Rey, Finn, Aliana,” Maz greeted warmly despite her current situation. “Good to see you all again. I might have to keep this transmission brief however, I’m a bit indisposed at the moment.”

“Good to see you again, Maz,” Aliana smiled, “So do you have something for us on a codebreaker?”

“You all have a tough nut to crack trying to get on the Supremacy,” Maz said between shots. “There’s only one man in the galaxy I could trust to break into a place like that. The Master Codebreaker.”

Rey’s brow furrowed in confusion. “That... that’s his name?” she asked.

“Business name,” Aliana explained, “Like Darth Amorosa.”

“A well deserved business name. He’s the best in the field,” Maz said as she rolled under a table for cover. “You’ll find him with a red plom bloom on his lapel, rolling at a high stakes table in the casino on Canto Bight.”

Aliana and Rose both frowned upon hearing the name of the planet.

“Canto Bight? What’s that?” Rey asked, looking around the room.

“The Capital City of Cantonica,” Aliana explained, “Mostly known as a hangout for wealthy business leaders. Over the last few years, it’s been mostly arms dealers skulking about.”

“It’s a terrible place, filled with the worst people,” Rose spat as she glared at it’s position on the holomap. “We can’t trust anyone who goes there.”

“You may have to if you want to get on that ship,” Maz countered, standing from behind her cover to unleash a flurry of shots at her unseen enemy. “Tell him that I sent you and you’ll have his support.”

Poe cut the transmission and looked around at the others, “What does everyone think?”

“The businessmen on Canto Bight owe allegiance to nobody but their own greed,” Aliana shrugged, “For the right price, they’d do anything.”

“Well I’m pretty much broke,” Finn said, pulling out his pockets.

“I think as long as we’re... charismatic in our approach I think we can get him on board.” Rey said before turning to look at Aliana. “What about you, Alie? You’re dripping with charisma.”

“Maybe. A lot of the regulars there already know me, at the very least it might make infiltration easier,” Aliana shrugged.

“How do they know you?!” Rose balked, looking at Aliana with a mixture of confusion and disgust.

“I’ve bought lightsaber parts from them before,” Aliana explained, “My entire stock of lightsaber crystals came from traders on Canto Bight.”

“How could you afford that?” Rey asked.

“The Force, a casino, you do the math.”

Poe pursed his lips as he dwelled on that thought. “You think you could Force swindle some more funds for the Resistance effort?” he asked coyly.

“One thing at a time, flyboy.” Aliana said. It was then her eyes narrowed as they often did when she had an idea. “Actually, if I’m going to Canto Bight, I think you should too.”

“R-Really?” Poe asked, surprised. “Why?”

“Might be good for you. I still don’t like that reckless stunt you tried to pull with the dreadnought over D’Qar,” Aliana replied as she looked at the galaxy map, “Canto Bight is full of arms dealers, who’ve gotten rich by double-dealing. The weapons, materials and ships they sell to the First Order, they also sell to us.”

“What!?” Rose asked incredulously.

Finn grimaced. “Great, so we’re at risk of losing this war, and the only impact our effort would have is filling rich people’s pockets. Can’t say I like that.”

“Did none of you know that?” Aliana asked, “Did you really think arms dealers would just neatly split between sides and keep to their lane?”

“I... I didn’t...” Rose stammered before leaning hard against the wall, as if this revelation was making her weak. “I can’t believe this,” she said quietly as Finn rushed over to see if she needed help

Rey sighed and placed a hand on Aliana’s shoulder. “If Poe gets to go with you, let me come along, at least,” she said.

“You’re going to be needed here, Rey,” Aliana said. “High Command still doesn’t know what we plan to do. If we both leave the Raddus, it will look suspicious and we won’t be able to retain secrecy. Besides, with Poe gone they’re going to need a new pilot to replace him.”

She turned to Finn and Rose, the latter of which was still reeling from her revelation, “What about either of you? Do you want to come?”

Finn looked over at Rose before turning to face Aliana. “I think we better stay here. There’s gotta be something we can do to help keep the First Order back while you’re gone.”

Rey frowned and kept her gaze on the Sith. “You’ll be careful, right?” she asked.

Aliana glanced up at Rey and smiled. While she was still adjusting to it, it felt good to have someone want her to be safe. To come home in one piece. An entire life of not needing to worry about her own safety, and now suddenly there was incentive to be just a little bit more careful.

“Of course I will, sweetheart,” Aliana smiled, “I love you.”

“I love you too, Alie.” Rey responded before tilting her head to kiss her. Her arms draped around Aliana’s shoulders as their lips lingered together for a moment longer. When Rey pulled away from the kiss, she had a warm smile on her face. “May the Force serve you well.” she said.

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Fight Smarter, Not Harder

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The Porg cooed and chirped as Aliana scratched under his chin, rubbing affectionately against her finger.

“I’ll be back before you know it, sweetie,” she said sweetly to the critter. “Take care of Rey while I’m gone, ok?”

The porg squeaked in affirmation, causing Aliana’s smile to widen. “Good boy. And I promise I’ll have a proper name for you when I get back.” Aliana stepped up from the table and made her way to her quarters. She grabbed a pack she had laying by the door and began packing essentials. Ration packs, medical supplies, spare components for her lightsaber should she need them. This would hopefully be an in and out procedure, but it never hurt to be more prepared.

The Porg chirped happily as Rey stepped forward and laid a hand on Aliana’s shoulder, “You sure you don’t want me to come with you?”

“You’re needed here, sweetie,” Aliana smiled as she hoisted her pack over her shoulder, “Keep the First Order off everyone’s back, and we’ll be back in a jiffy with a... what was it again?”

“Master Codebreaker,” Poe rolled his eyes.

“Master Codebreaker! I still don’t know what he does,” Aliana smiled. She kissed Rey’s cheek and smiled at her, “I’m going to miss seeing your face though...”

“I’m going to miss yours too,” Rey said, cupping Aliana’s face in her hands. “And just when I got used to waking up next to it,” she said with a sight pout. A pout that was kissed off of her face by the Sith.

“God it is just all day with you two, isn’t it?” Poe asked, shaking his head.

“We spent most of our lives alone before we found each other, *Captain* !” Aliana said with a glare, “That’s the start of a beautiful romance novel now shut the kriff up before I stab you!”

As Rey and Aliana parted, the Sith turned to Finn and smiled, pulling a cloth-wrapped bundle out of her cloak and presenting it to him, “This is for you. I spent most of the night finishing it.”

Finn eyed the bundle as he took it into his hands. His curiosity turned into shock and wonder as he pulled the cloth aside to reveal a lightsaber hilt. “Holy-!” he said, immediately grasping the weapon in his free hand. With a slight change in his grip a silver beam of light shot out from the hilt. “...Oh, I like this,” he said with a smile.

“I’m glad you do,” Aliana smiled, laying a hand on his shoulder, “You’re going to need it.”

She turned and followed Poe onto the shuttle, turning back to wave goodbye to her two friends as the ramp closed and the engines started to hum. As she sat down in the co-pilot’s seat, she sighed at the thought of two days in space without either Rey or Finn. Instead with a pilot who, frankly, she

still didn't really know all that well. She shrugged as she looked down at the co-pilot's control and then stopped.

She had no idea how to control a Resistance shuttle.

"Uh, Poe?"

"Yeah?" Poe asked, puzzled by Aliana's lack of movement at the controls.

"...How do I get this thing to lift off?" she asked sheepishly.

"Are you that unfamiliar with simple transports?" Poe asked incredulously.

"I barely know how to fly my own ship," Aliana admitted. "When I don't have 2V flying the Fury, I'm using the Force to fly it."

"Come on you can't be that tech illiterate," Poe said in disbelief.

"I spent a half hour trying to open a fuel converter that was locked," Aliana said flatly.

"Wow..." Poe winced, "Alright, as long as we're on this mission, you're going to learn something. Start by priming the Hyperdrive for ignition, the third control on your right."

Aliana nodded and scanned the control board for the switch that Poe specified. "Okay," Aliana said, flipping the switch. "Now what?"

"Disengage the docking clamps with the lever on the wall beside you, and then slowly push up on the throttle by your left hand," Poe instructed as he performed a systems check.

"Okay..." Aliana said, beginning to feel uncertain. After she pulled the lever, she engaged with the throttle, slowly and carefully pushing it upwards. Her nerves only worsened as she felt the ship begin to rumble and move.

"It's alright, you're doing fine," Poe said, glancing at the position sensor, "Just keep your eyes on the hangar gate and slowly push the throttle to your right to move us out into space."

Aliana nodded, biting her lip nervously. She felt the transport ship wobble slightly as it lifted from the hanger floor. She pushed the throttle as slowly as her hand could possibly move as they drew closer and closer to the gate. She silently cursed under her breath, displeased with how nervous she continued to be.

The shuttle pushed forward at a steady speed and through the hangar into open space. Aliana relaxed considerably at having more room and pushed the throttle a little harder to speed away from the ship.

"There we are, congratulations. You just launched a shuttle," Poe smiled as he took the controls, "Now switch off the Hyperdrive priming sequence and get ready to jump to lightspeed."

"Right," Aliana said with a nod. She reached over the control panel before stopping. Her eyes scanned over the panel before looking sheepishly back at Poe. "Uuummm..."

"Third switch on the right," Poe clarified.

Aliana flipped the switch back. "I knew that," she said.

"Now push the hyperdrive lever on the far right of the console."

Aliana did and the ship lurched forward as it jumped to lightspeed, the screen filling with the familiar blue vortex of Hyperspace, "Hey! I didn't kill us all!"

"No you didn't. Congratulations," Poe said with just the barest hints of sarcasm. "You've taken one step out from the cavern of tech illiteracy."

Aliana smiled at him, "Thanks. I want to be able to fly the Fury without the Force or a Droid, it's just always like the controls blur together."

Poe shrugged. "I can understand that, I think," he said. "I don't know how the Force affects your other senses on a day to day basis, but I can see it causing things to blur together. It's mostly been instinct and muscle memory for me after I learned the basics."

"It's not the Force, it's like every shape and light on a ship's console keeps shifting places," Aliana explained, "Most devices are like that, all switches and wires and strange inward bends that all just seem to bleed together and shuffle around. I actually had to replace the buttons on the holoterminal on the Fury with textured metal just so I could let my fingers find them."

"Really?" Poe asked, tilting his head slightly. "Can't say I ever heard of that one before. Tell you what, when we get back, you might want to have a medical exam. See what that's about."

"I've had medical exams constantly, they all come out saying there's nothing wrong with me," Aliana shook her head, "I just don't get machines."

"Alright then," Poe said with a shrug. His gaze turned to the holomap that lit up between them. "It'll be about a day or so before we reach Canto Bight. I hope the others can hold on until we can make it back."

"They've got about four days of fuel, so we should be fine," Aliana said as she got up from the co-pilot's seat.

"Alright, so don't get held up on Canto. I think we can handle that," Poe said with a reassured smile. "You're efficient and I'm fa-" he cut himself off after remembering Aliana's retort the last time he said something like that. "...Shut up."

"Hey, I'm gay. I have no frame of reference," Aliana snickered.

Poe narrowed his eyes at Aliana before returning his gaze to the viewport. "So when we reach the planet, do you have a game plan in mind?"

"Find the Master Codebreaker, recruit him, draw lightsaber if he refuses," Aliana said as she bent over and rifled through her pack, looking for the crystals she'd brought to trade with in case she needed them, "Pretty much my go-to."

"Alright then," Poe said. "I've done crazier things with less. It's a shame you didn't have this sort of taste for risk back on D'Qar. We would have had one less Dreadnought to worry about."

"I'm pretty sure the Supremacy tailing after us has made it clear that the Dreadnought was inconsequential," Aliana said as she returned to the co-pilot's seat, a handful of lightsaber crystals

clutched in her fist, “And we’d be down a lot of manpower for the fighter squadron.”

“And that manpower is just sitting in their cruisers practically waiting for death if we can’t pull this off. Is waiting for death really that much better than dying on their feet?” He asked with a furrowed brow.

“If too many of you die on your feet, you may as well lay down and surrender,” Aliana retorted, “Poe, you can’t... you know what? This trip really is going to be good for you. Maybe you’ll learn by senseless self-sacrifice is for fools.”

“Nothing for a good cause is ever senseless,” Poe countered. “But sure, let’s see if this little adventure can make a wiser man out of me, or whatever.”

“Oh you’ll find out,” Aliana smirked. She knew, of course. She knew exactly why Poe’s bravado and willingness to sacrifice massive amounts of resources for small, symbolic victories was foolish. But Poe would never listen until he saw it for himself. That was the kind of flyboy he was. He thought war was fun and heroic.

For a man in his thirties, he was as naïve as a child.

The sound of the holoterminal was surprising to say the least. A short range transmission? That could have only come from one place. The very place that had been firing on them for the past hour.

“Is this real?” Leia asked as she looked at the holoterminal in disbelief.

“The First Order has stopped firing, General,” Ackbar said, looking away from the tactical station.

Holdo offered no response, turning her gaze from the holoterminal to Leia, silently asking how they proceed.

Leia swallowed hard and said, “Open the channel.”

Amilyn pressed a button on the terminal, the monochromatic image of General Hux appearing before them.

“General Organa,” he said with a curt bow.

“General Hux,” Leia said, glaring at him. Hux’s propensity for politeness even during a life or death scenario was something Leia was convinced he did purely to antagonize his opponent, “To what do I owe the displeasure?”

“This call is one of decorum, General,” he said plainly. “I simply wish to do your little Resistance a courtesy.”

“What kind of courtesy?” Holdo asked with an unconvinced arched brow.

“I am willing to call off the pursuit on your fleet and allow you to resume safely on course to your next quaint hovel, wherever that may be,” Hux said in a smarmy tone.

Leia raised an eyebrow in disbelief, “And am I to assume that there is some kind of price for such... mercy, General?” she asked, waiting for the other shoe to drop.

“A small act of goodwill, I assure you,” Hux said. “We require that you turn the Sith Lord, Darth Amorosa, over to us. Her actions against us have been egregious enough that her capture will justify letting you go in the eyes of the Supreme Leader.”

The bridge became deathly quiet as Ackbar and Holdo turned nervous eyes to Leia. Rey, standing opposite of her, was glaring daggers at her. All three of them were waiting for her to say something. Anything. Probably the wrong thing.

“...And just what would you do with her if I handed her over?” Leia asked, her galaxy-famous pazaak face holding steady.

“That is nothing you need to concern yourself with, General,” Hux said with a dismissive wave of his hand. “All you need to do is hand the Sith over and your fleet is free to go. That’s more than fair I would say.”

“I believe it is my concern. If you intend to kill Amorosa, then I’d have nothing to worry about. But if Snoke had it in his head to turn her... well you can see why that would make being free to go of little comfort to most of us here,” Leia held up a hand as Rey opened her mouth to yell.

Hux looked off to the side, as if he was considering his next words carefully. “What is to become of the Sith is for the Supreme Leader to decide, and we shall know exactly what that is when he deems it necessary. If I were a gambling man, however, I do believe he intends to swiftly and brutally end her feeble petulant existence. Surely someone in your position couldn’t argue the benefits of that.”

Leia glanced at a bridge worker who gave her a thumbs up, and she turned back to Hux with a smile, “General, as much as I would love to help you out it is completely out of my hands. Lord Amorosa is simply too powerful for my forces to capture and subdue. What you’re really offering is to be killed by you, or be killed by her. If you want her to surrender herself, you’ll have to make your case to her directly.”

Hux resisted the urge to frown as his hands fidgeted behind his back. “...I can’t imagine she would be in much of a hurry to contact us to negotiate her own surrender,” he said through clenched teeth. “Are you certain there is nothing you can do to turn her over to us? Last we checked, you have a new Jedi in your ranks.”

Leia glanced at Rey, who was looking at her with more hatred in her eyes than she would have ever thought possible. She’d understand once the signal was cut, at the very least, “Our Jedi isn’t strong enough to overpower Lord Amorosa. Amorosa would cut her down without hesitation.”

Hux looked visibly annoyed, even if his anger only paled in comparison to Rey’s. “I am doing my best to be accomodating General, but you are not making this easy,” he said.

“We’re talking about a Sith Lord, General. There is only so much I can do,” Leia explained, “I just don’t see how even attempting to subdue Amorosa would benefit us, which is the entire point of negotiations after all.”

Hux pursed his thin lips as an idea brewed into his head. “...Perhaps we should see what the rest of your fleet has to say about this proposition,” he said. “You Republic folk certainly love your democracy, I’m sure they would vote in favor of handing the Sith over to us if we transmitted the offer to the rest of your ships.”

Leia's polite smile grew into a smirk, "General, my dislike of the Sith has almost caused four different mutinies, but you're more than welcome to try."

A sneer grew on Hux's face, his hands clenched tightly into fists behind his back. His nostrils flared as he took a deep breath before continuing. "Well, then... I'm nothing if not considerate, so perhaps I can interest you in a third option," he said lowly. "If you cannot hand over the Sith for us, then I'm sure the Supreme Leader will accept the Jedi in her place. She shouldn't be too hard to subdue and surrender to us. This way, you and your fleet still escape and you get to keep your favorite pet. It doesn't get more ideal than that."

Leia glanced at Rey, who by this point had become so livid that her eyes were burning yellow and her fingers were crackling with electricity. Leia signalled to another officer and motioned for him to come over. He then said loudly enough for Hux and the rest of the room to hear, "Go to the Commander's quarters behind the engine section and bring her to me."

Seeming to understand, the officer nodded and immediately left the bridge, leaving everyone else confused and Rey momentarily off her guard.

"I'll have her brought here to speak directly to you, General," Leia said with a fake smile, "Though I am curious if your plans for the Jedi are the same as your plans for the Sith."

"As I said, the Supreme Leader's intentions are his own and shares his reasons with us on his own prerogative," Hux explained again, dismissively. "Regardless, it doesn't remove your new best piece from the board, so I'd hardly call it a major loss."

"Very well, General. I'll contact you again when Rey is here," Leia said, cutting the transmission without another word.

Almost immediately, Rey rounded on her, "What the hell was that?!"

Leia responded by glancing at the officer she'd acknowledged before, "Connix?"

"I have it, General!" Connix exclaimed, "Every single document, crew manifest, and schematics of the Supremacy."

"Good," Leia nodded, "Start looking for a weakness!"

Rey blinked, burning anger being washed over by sudden confusion. "Wait, what just happened?" She asked, dumbfounded. "What did you do?"

"I wasn't actually going to give up you or the Sith," Leia explained, "I was stalling for time so Connix could download as much information as possible through the transmission stream. Even if we can't exploit a weakness, if we get out of this that data will be extremely valuable to the Republic. The Supremacy is a fleet in it's own right, and having access to it's schematics would render it helpless."

"That..." Rey trailed off as the information wracked in her head. "...that's brilliant! How did you manage to do that without them knowing?"

"We have very capable specialists," Leia said with a smile. "It also helps that the First Order are apparently too proud to properly encrypt their data worth a damn."

“So now what do we do?” Rey asked, her anger dissipating, “We have the info, what’s our next step?”

“Well we have what we need from that unpleasant conversation,” Leia said. “I say we resume our course and see how long the general goes before realizing there’s no deal to be made. In the meantime, why don’t you grab Finn and look over the schematics? See if you find anything useful.”

Rey nodded, taking the datapad offered by Connix and retreating from the bridge. At the very least, Leia had bought them twenty minutes at most to reinforce the ship and prepare a plan of attack.

Or escape.

Hux should have expected this. On some level, he did. It had been an hour and no transmission from the Resistance fleet had come. It appeared they had in fact been stalling for time to make repairs and reinforcements. No matter, he thought. It was a long shot to expect they would accept such an olive branch, especially one that would have worked out against them in the long run.

Nevertheless, the Resistance was as good as dead. Hux had only hoped to take this chance to snuff out a far more dangerous threat sooner rather than later. Even in the face of certain victory, they couldn’t be too careful. Especially not after Starkiller Base.

His gaze turned to the Admiral. “Resume the pursuit,” he said plainly. “They had their chance to cooperate. Now they shall die their slow, hopeless death.”

“Your deception failed,” said Kylo Ren behind him, making Hux’s blood boil instantaneously.

“Such failure is irrelevant,” Hux huffed, “We will take the Jedi regardless, and draw the Sith to us. And the Resistance fleet will burn in the meantime.”

“Such confidence is what led to us losing our most powerful weapon, General,” Kylo countered, standing next to Hux. “The longer we wait to kill the Sith, the more prepared she will be against us.”

“And what would you have us do instead, Kylo Ren?” Hux responded sharply. “Have you fly to the fleet out of range of our Destroyers so their fighters can make an absolute fool of you *again* !? Or perhaps get you aboard the Raddus so that the Sith and Jedi can defeat you in lightsaber combat *again* !? Or perhaps you can reach out with the Force and fail to get valuable information from the Jedi’s mind *again* !?”

“I am only saying that-”

“Enough! You know full well the Supreme Leader intends to replace you the moment he can get his hands on either of them,” Hux scoffed, “Your position in the First Order is about to change dramatically, so do not presume to give me orders. You take them, or I will have Phasma remove you from my bridge.”

Kylo was silent for a beat. His fists were trembling as he swallowed a lump in his throat. Hux’s gaze remained locked onto his, even as it faltered. It was plainly clear at this point that the General was no longer afraid of him anymore, if he ever was to begin with. He had fallen out of favor with Snoke, meaning whatever action he took against the higher officers would be met with harsh,

possibly lethal, reprimanding. He looked at this Force-blind, unarmed man before him whom he could kill with his mind with barely a breath of effort, and he felt truly powerless before him.

“...Yes, General,” Kylo said, taking a step back.

Hux returned his gaze out toward the fleeing cruiser, now under fire from the entire fleet once again. Kylo Ren, for his part, quietly left the bridge and stormed down toward his meditation chambers. He was finished. Unless a miracle could be pulled off, he would be reduced to serving whoever the new leader of the Knights would be. His blood curdled at the thought of the Sith commanding him, and he so desperately wanted to slice into every single surface with his lightsaber as he pressed on. As intense as the urge was, however, he resisted. He couldn't afford to be reckless or destructive. He couldn't afford to invoke the wrath of anyone else aboard this ship. It would get him nowhere.

He needed to take a new approach and it only frustrated him greater that he couldn't figure out what that new approach should be.

In the back of his mind, he felt an impulse. The impulse to take a stealth ship out to the Raddus and capture the Jedi himself. Redeem himself in the eyes of the Supreme Leader by taking the girl and bringing her to him. A risky move, as Rey had only grown more powerful. But he recalled how every time he had spoken to him, Rey had been rendered completely vulnerable until the

Sith intervened. And he couldn't sense the Sith anywhere in the sector let alone on the ship. He noticed this even before Hux decided to contact the Resistance, but said nothing. This piece of information was the only bit of leverage he had on the situation. He would deal with it himself. It's the only way he could guarantee his station as head of the Knights. Any other approach could be spun in a way to discredit him. He couldn't allow that.

“I just got a transmission from the Fury,” Aliana said as she glanced down at the holocom, “It says that Hux tried to barter for my surrender.”

“Really?” Poe said, looking up from the control panel. “Makes sense I suppose, you are one of our heavy hitters. Combine that with how the General tends to treat you and I can see why Hux thought that would work.”

“Still, that's worrisome,” Aliana shook her head as they pulled the shuttle out of Hyperspace above Cantonica, “That the First Order think I can be bartered with like that means they're planning something. I never should have left, I should be there with them.”

“All the more reason we should get this mission done with as soon as possible,” Poe said. “The sooner we get what we need, the sooner we can get back to the fleet with something that can help them.”

Aliana nodded as Poe brought the shuttle in for a landing onto a beach just outside the city. As they secured the controls so nobody would snatch it, the two gathered their things and departed. Poe looked up at the city in wonder. Almost every building seemed to shimmer in the moonlight, giving the entire city a look of being covered in jewels.

“Are these buildings made of gold?” he asked.

“Polished duranium,” Aliana corrected, “About four times as expensive.”

“Damn,” Poe said, impressed. “These people are insanely rich.”

“Hey! You two!” a voice called out to the pair. Aliana and Poe looked in the direction of the noise to see two other men approaching them, their uniforms and belt mounted weapons identified them as members of a security force. “You can’t land your ship here without clearance!” the guard yelled.

“We are exempt from docking procedures,” Aliana said as she extended her hands to the guards.

“You are exempt from docking procedures,” they said, slightly monotone, “My apologies, ma’am. Have a nice night.”

Aliana nodded and walked past the guards, gesturing for Poe to follow her. The pilot caught up to her before speaking in a hushed tone of voice. “Isn’t that mind trick thing more of a Jedi technique?” he asked. “I was expecting you to choke them into submission.”

“It wasn’t a mind trick,” Aliana replied, “It was mind control. It’s a lot harder to resist and easier to coerce people into doing the unthinkable. I used to to make Stormtroopers commit suicide on Ilum.”

“...OK, remind me not to get on your bad side then.” Poe said with a shudder. “I don’t need another Dark Side user in my head again.”

“Another?” Aliana stopped and turned to Poe, “There was one in your head before?”

Poe clenched his jaw as a series of unpleasant memories came to the forefront of his mind. “...When the First Order captured me on Jakku, Kylo Ren came in to interrogate me. He... broke into my mind to get information about the map. I tried to stop him, but.. I didn’t know how,” he said almost meekly while he wrapped his arms around himself. “It... it hurt. It was unlike any pain I ever felt before.”

Aliana laid a hand on Poe’s shoulder and squeezed gently. This had been the same thing Rey was put through, and she had to deal with him constantly breaking back into her mind until she shut the connection down, “Poe, that’s horrible. I’m so sorry,” she said quietly, “Is there anything I can do?”

Poe felt himself relax slightly from Aliana’s touch. Despite knowing how terrifyingly powerful the Sith was, he still trusted her. Despite the wave of fear that washed over him, he felt secure standing beside her. “...I guess if you could promise not to get inside my head like he did, that’d be appreciated,” he said with a small smile.

Aliana nodded, “I’ve been a lot more careful about mind probes after Rey went through the same thing. I promise, I won’t use that power on you. Only when I need to on others.”

Poe’s smile became more genuine as he placed a hand on Aliana’s shoulder. “...Thanks, Aliana,” he said. “I appreciate that.”

Aliana smiled and took her hand off of him and gestured toward the casino, “C’mon, we have a rich hacker to extort.”

“Right behind you, Commander,” he said with a nod. Just as quickly as the intense wave of fear washed over him, it had subsided. The lingering feeling of unpleasantness remained, but it felt much farther away than it had a moment ago.

As the two of them entered the casino, they were overwhelmed by the sound of music, chatter and the jingling of credit chips that permeated the air like wasps around a carcass. Aliana pressed a finger to her temple and hissed as the sheer volume made her skull throb painfully. She'd been to Canto Bight before. She'd been to many casinos to use the Force to cheat and acquire easy credits, but today was already not a good day for her and the noise only exacerbated that.

"I hate this city," she mumbled as she and Poe walked around looking for a man with a flower on his chest.

Poe ceased looking around at just how glamorous the inside of the casino was to look at Aliana, who was looking physically uncomfortable with their surroundings. It was admittedly bright and loud, which could be aggravating for anyone, but he had a feeling that wasn't the only thing that wasn't bothering her. "You okay?" he asked.

"I don't much care for casinos in general, they give me migraines," Aliana explained, "Normally it's bearable, but today's already been kinda stressful. I'll be fine, I'm just whining."

"Okay, if you're sure," Poe said, looking to scan the casino over. "I don't see anyone that's wearing a carnation. Do you?"

"Not yet," Aliana said, looking about the large crowded room with squinted eyes.

"Can you sense him at all?" Poe asked.

"I don't know exactly what I'm looking for, so I can't pick his presence out from anybody else's," Aliana explained, "Everyone has a unique feeling in the Force, but it's like a face. If you don't know them, you may as well be looking at their feet."

Poe nodded in understanding and turned his gaze back to the massive crowds. Between the outlandish outfits, the assortment of different races and layout of the main floor, it was hard to pick anything out of the crowd. It all just blended together, not helped by how bright and loud everything was.

"...You think he might have stepped outside for fresh air or anything?" Poe asked.

"Probably," Aliana shrugged, gesturing toward the balconies, "I'm already sick of this place anyway, so let's go."

Poe looked for an outside exit and found an opening to a balcony that he led Aliana towards. As they stepped out, the cool night air that blew against them made them realize just how warm and borderline suffocating the air was inside. "Holy hell, that's better," Poe said with a relieved sigh.

"Casinos like to keep a hot temperature to interfere with people's judgment," Aliana explained as she took a deep breath and leaned over the railing, "Keeps them spending without the legal risks of filling them up with alcohol."

"Huh," Poe said, absorbing the information. "Guess this place really does suck in as much money as it can," he said before noting how perturbed Aliana still looked. He leaned against the railing with her as they looked over the view before them. "I'm guessing that's not all that's bugging you about this place, though, is it?"

“No, nothing bothers me aside from the noise and the lights,” Aliana shook her head, “I’ve long since accepted the statement this city makes about the galaxy.”

“What statement?” Poe asked curiously.

Aliana pointed down toward the racetrack. Poe followed her gaze to see a handful of children tending to one of the animals. They were being watched over by a large alien holding a very long and very threatening looking stun-stick.

Poe’s narrowed gaze suddenly widened in shock and abject horror at the sight. “Those kids...” he said, his voice slightly shaken. “...They’re slaves.”

“Close enough to it for the differences not to matter,” Aliana corrected him, “The Republic relies on many of the people who patron this casino in order to keep running. Ships, the navy, infrastructure, they all come from businesses owned by someone in this casino. And that gives them leverage to make the Republic turn a blind eye to *that* .”

Poe’s hands gripped the railing until his knuckles turned white. He couldn’t believe this. How could the Republic he had been fighting to save from the First Order allow this kind of thing to exist? Did these war profiteers really have that much influence over them? How could money blind people to this kind of evil? The more he thought about it, the angrier he became. It was then that another, unfortunate realization suddenly hit him and caused a sinking feeling to form in the pit of his stomach.

"...You said that these people did business with the First Order and the Resistance, right?" he asked, not wanting to hear the answer he already knew.

Aliana nodded, “Mmhmm. Arms dealers making double the money by selling to both sides of the war.”

"...So if we had taken out that dreadnought... and lost the bombers..." Poe trailed off.

“The Resistance would have had to get a new bombing fleet,” Aliana nodded, “And this is where they would have gotten it.”

Poe hung his head low against the railing. ‘Nothing for a good cause is ever senseless’ he heard himself say in his head. He realized in a twisted way he was right. Those Resistance fighters wouldn’t have died for nothing. They would have died to make these insanely rich people even richer.

“I...” he began before swallowing hard. “...Thanks. For stopping me,” he said finally.

Aliana smiled and laid a hand on Poe’s shoulder, “The way these people interfere with the war changes how you have to approach it,” she explained, “Symbolic victories might inspire people, but they will quickly be undone.”

It did not feel good to hear this information. It felt even worse to know that it was true. “...Okay,” Poe said. “I get it now. Fight smarter, not harder.”

“Exactly,” Aliana nodded, “Focus on the big victories. The First Order can replace a dreadnought. But they can’t replace Starkiller Base. And we blew that base up with very few losses. Heavy costs for the First Order, almost none for us. Don’t take heavy losses. Cause them. That’s how you stop

the First Order. You recognize that those people there will happily sell more weapons to the First Order. So you fight smart and you bleed the First Order dry.”

“And the smarter we fight, the sooner we can win this war,” he said, turning his gaze back to the children just off the race track, one of them having seemingly provoked the wrath of the one with the stun stick, “and then we can focus on other matters.”

“Precisely,” Aliana said as she casually waved her hand. Down in the field below, the alien with the stun stick jerked his head to the side before collapsing onto the ground, twitching slightly. In a single clean motion, Aliana had snapped his neck.

Poe’s was awestruck at the sight, his mind unable to find any words to describe the level of focus and ruthlessness that he just witnessed. Save for one word. “Nice.”

Aliana turned her head to the balcony beside them, at a crowd of wealthy businessmen who were cheering and celebrating the race. She subtly lifted her hand and flicked her finger, and both of them watched as each and every person there suddenly got a glassy look into their eyes, before hurling themselves over the railing for a twenty storey fall to the hard stone below.

Poe blinked, having not expected such an act from Aliana so soon after her first Force based homicide. “I mean...” he began somewhat awkwardly, “I suppose it would be easier to find the Master Codebreaker when there’s less people alive, if that’s what you’re going for,” he said.

“Hadn’t occurred to me,” Aliana shrugged, “That was just for fun.”

“Boy am I glad you’re on our side,” he said under his breath.

Rey was hunched over the workbench, the two disassembled hilts laying haphazardly in front of her as she continued trying to wire the parts together. Building her lightsaber had proven to be a difficult challenge, and not at all the way she’d seen it portrayed in holocrons. There was no serene assembling of parts, just good old fashioned mechanics. She’d been at this for days, and was still only halfway done. Even worse, she still didn’t have crystals that felt right to her.

As much as Aliana had dismissed Force Sensitive crystals, she had encouraged Rey to find a color and gemstone that she felt a more sentimental connection to. A hard task when digging through a massive stock of crystals, all of which felt the same to her.

If she was being honest, the crystal she felt most connected to was in her already working lightsaber simply because Aliana had selected it for a gift. She ultimately decided against just transferring it over as she felt her own lightsaber should feel like her own creation and it never hurt to have the one Aliana gifted her ready as a spare if she needed it. Still, the urge remained nibbling at the back of her mind. That crystal gave Rey a fair degree of comfort. It was as if even they were lightyears apart, she still had her Sith with her. A sentiment that she was in need of more than ever now that they really were lightyears apart.

Her self reflection was interrupted when she heard a knocking at the door of the workshop. She lifted her head and turned to see Finn waving at her from the entrance.

“Hey,” he said with a smile. “Didn’t wanna startle you when you’re in position of a deadly weapon,” he quipped.

“Smart,” Rey smirked playfully as she motioned for him to come in, “I’m doing well, but I still don’t like to be surprised anymore.”

“That’s fair,” Finn nodded before stepping into the room to see what Rey had laid out on the workbench. “Wow, still working on this?” he asked.

“Lightsabers are complicated,” Rey nodded as she set the tools down and turned to face him, “Especially the kind I’m trying to make. But I’m not getting anywhere without a crystal anyway.”

Finn’s brow furrowed slightly. “What do you mean? Shouldn’t Aliana have plenty?” he asked. “Or did she take all the spare crystals with her to Canto Bight?”

“None of the crystals she has really... feel right, I guess? It’s hard to say, but Alie always told me to pick a crystal that has a sentimental value to me,” Rey explained, “But aside from the one in this lightsaber I don’t really have one. Crystals are crystals, ya know?”

Finn leaned against the wall, letting out a sympathetic huff of breath. “Huh, then I guess in that case.... Just pick your favorite color?” he proposed with a shrug.

“Alie has twelve different crystals in every color,” Rey explained as she pulled out a few examples, “Each of them feels different, each of them weighs different, and each of them produces a different blade. Trust me, it’s not an easy task.”

“Oh wow,” Finn said as he looked down at the lightsaber hanging off of his belt. “I guess I was lucky to get mine as a gift then.”

“See that’s the thing,” Rey said, pulling out her working lightsaber, “The one Alie made for me actually *does* feel special because of that. But I can’t just take the crystal out, because... well, it was a gift. Am I weird for that?”

“Nah, I get that,” Finn said. “Things are more important to you when they’re a gift. Hell, my name is a gift. Literally.” He didn’t really spend much time thinking about that fact, but it was true. Finn’s own name was a gift given to him by Poe. A gift that helped him distance himself from the First Order. A gift he treasured very dearly and wouldn’t ever give up.

“Yeah, I heard a similar story about a Jedi who was given a Sith name by her wife a long time ago,” Rey smiled, “It all just... makes you feel closer to home, doesn’t it?”

“It does,” Finn said with a fond smile. “You think Aliana might gift you with her name someday? Her last name I mean?” he asked, his grin turning a degree more cheeky.

Rey’s eyes widened, “Oh, um... I don’t know, it’s a little early to be thinking about that, isn’t it?” she said, her face flushing as she pictured Aliana proposing to her.

“Yeah, yeah. I’m just playin’,” Finn said, patting Rey’s shoulders. “I think we better focus on getting out of this war alive before any of us start thinking about stuff like that.”

Rey nodded as she turned her attention back to her lightsaber, before feeling a lot less motivation to complete it. She set the pieces back into the drawer she kept them in when she wasn’t working on it and stood up to give Finn a hug.

“Yeah, I’d hate to make those kinds of plans only for...” Rey felt the words catch in her throat.

Finn returned the hug, patting her back affectionately. "Hey don't worry about it," he said soothingly. "Aliana's gonna be just fine. You'll see."

"I know that," Rey said, nuzzling into Finn's shoulder, "I just can't help but worry. I have this feeling that I'm about to lose her. Or at least get too close to it for my liking."

"I hear you," Finn said sympathetically. In those last few moments before he lost consciousness on Starkiller Base, he was all but certain he was a goner. The fact that he survived seemed nothing short of miraculous. Everything felt different after that day, somehow more and less certain simultaneously. All he knew for sure was that he had to make every moment count.

"But hey," Finn said, pulling away slightly to look Rey in the eyes. "You two are the best fighters we have. If anyone is going to make it out of this war alive, it's you and Alie. Just watch each other's backs and you'll be fine."

"Thanks Finn," she said, kissing his cheek, "But I want you to come out alive too."

Finn smiled and shrugged, hoping the heat he felt in his cheeks wasn't visible. "If I wasn't meant to come out of this alive, I'd be slag by now," he replied. "You guys are stuck with me now."

Rey smiled and laid a hand on Finn's cheek, "Thanks Finn, that—" she stopped when she realized his face was hot to the touch, "Finn? Are you alright? You're burning up."

"Hm?" Finn mused. "Oh, yeah, I'm fine I just... uh..." he trailed off before bringing a hand to his mouth as he cleared his throat. "It's a lot warmer in the hangar than it is in this ship I think. I guess I kinda brought that heat in with me... or something."

Rey's eyes narrowed as she raised a brow, "Finn, you know what happened when Alie lied to me, right?"

Finn opened his mouth to say something but the words didn't come. Any attempts at a cover her had died in his throat before he let out an exasperated sigh. "...It's nothing really," he insisted. "It's just that... well, when you are this close I get a little flustered, you know?"

"...Oh," Rey said, backing away from him as she realized what he'd implied, "Oh, I'm sorry I... didn't know you felt that way about me..."

"Well, in your defense, I never told you how I felt." He said with a shrug. "It's no big deal. I know you chose to be with Aliana and I don't resent her or you over that. I'm happy with the way things are, I promise. It's just... it's just how I feel," he said, his eyes falling to the floor.

Rey smiled as she looked at him, feeling happy in the knowledge that Finn was happy for her. In truth, she had none of those feelings for Finn that she had for Aliana. The very idea hadn't even occurred to her. She'd battled with her attraction to the Sith since they left Jakku, but Finn had always been a lot easier to be around. As she sat down on the couch, she motioned for him to join her.

Finn was slightly unnerved by Rey's complete silence despite her smile, but walked over to sit beside her on the couch regardless.

"Thanks, Finn," Rey smiled, laying a hand on his knee, "It means a lot to hear that from you. A lot happened while you were out and I needed to hear a friend say they just wanted me to be happy."

Especially after what Leia and Luke said to me about her. As well as..." she trailed off as her next thought died, unable to finish forming without making her want to retch.

Finn could see how uneasy Rey had begun to feel and could only assume she was thinking about Kylo Ren. He grasped the hand she placed on his knee and squeezed it affectionately. "I know," he said reassuringly. "None of that could have been easy, especially not... especially not the thing we are just not gonna talk about. Just know that I'll be here for you. Both of you. No matter what."

Rey nodded and wrapped her arms around Finn's shoulders, hugging him tightly, "You're a good friend, Finn. I love you."

"I love you too," Finn said, returning the hug just as firmly. "I got your back, Rey."

Chapter End Notes

If you enjoyed this chapter, leave a comment explaining why. Free content thrives on interaction and feedback.

The "Darth" in "Darth Amorosa"

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"I'm starting to feel like we'll have better luck at one of these game tables than we will finding this guy," Poe said, exasperated. He and Aliana had just finished their seventh lap around the gaming floor only to find no trace of the Master Codebreaker.

"Well I can certainly take this entire casino to the cleaners if you'd like," Aliana offered. "Having the Force and all."

"If we weren't on a deadline, I'd be up for it," Poe replied.

"Hey!" Barked a security guard, grabbing the pair's attention. "You here to play or are you here to meander? Policy doesn't allow for loitering."

Poe looked over to Aliana, making sure she wasn't jumping to kill another person when there were hundreds of witnesses around before he acknowledged the guard. "Apologies. We'll take a seat over... there!" Poe said, pointing at a pazaak table. "Alie, come along."

Aliana followed Poe to the table, giving him an unamused look. "'Come along'? What am I, your ward?"

"I don't know how rich people talk, okay?" He said defensively.

"Well here's a hint. You ever presume to give me orders, and you're going to be rich enough to jump from a balcony," Aliana glared him down before sitting at the pazaak table, "And you could have just told him we were looking for someone."

"Okay, fine. One game of this to get security off our back and we'll do things your way," Poe said.

"Place your bets," the card dealer said, eyes dark with the fatigue from what Aliana and Poe could only guess was several consecutive days of double shifts. The pair placed some money onto the table, waiting for the dealer to give them their cards.

"What say another small game to wind things down, eh ladies?" came a voice that took a seat on Aliana's left. She and Poe looked over to see a man joining the table with two women accompanying him. He had black, slicked back hair, a moustache, wore a sharp white ensemble suit complete with a red carnation pinned to the left side of his coat.

Aliana blinked, silent for a beat. "...Huh."

She glanced back at Poe, who had the biggest shit-eating grin plastered across his face.

"Shut up."

She looked down at her cards as she tried to think of a way to address the Codebreaker. She watched as the dealer drew their play-cards and tapped the table to indicate she wouldn't lay a card this turn, "That's a nice pin," she said.

“Thank you,” the Codebreaker said, glancing over to Aliana. “It’s worth more money than you’re used to seeing, I’m sure.”

Poe covered his face with a hand, visibly wincing at the Codebreakers remark. Aliana only smirked as she pulled her lightsaber off her belt and laid it down on the edge of the table.

“Try again,” she smirked.

The Codebreakers brow raised, a daring smirk teasing the edge of his mouth. “Oh, perhaps this will be interesting after all,” he said, placing a pile of chips onto the table. “So what’s your story darling? Surely that smuggler over there isn’t with you.”

“Define *with*,” Aliana snickered, “And he isn’t a smuggler.”

She glanced back at Poe and mouthed ‘ *Are you?* ’

Poe shook his head after a moment’s hesitation, prompting curiosity to grow in the back of Aliana’s mind.

“A free agent are we?” the Codebreaker mused, absently glancing over his cards. “My favorite. What’s your trade?”

“Mercenary,” Aliana said, “Currently doing some high-risk work for the Resistance.”

“That so?” the Codebreaker asked with an arched brow. “Can’t imagine they managed to outbid their... competitors.”

“Sometimes it’s not about the total, it’s about the challenge,” Aliana smirked, spinning her lightsaber with the Force as she laid down a card.

“Ah, a woman after my own heart,” he said with a smirk. The comment prompted the two ladies on either side of him to cast glares at Aliana. Poe meanwhile resolved to keep his eyes on his cards and let the Sith do the talking.

“You like yourself a challenge too, eh?” Aliana smiled, winking at one of the girls beside him.

“There’s no point in things being too easy, now is there? Speaking of which, I stand.” The codebreaker told the card dealer, making his cards total value nineteen.

“I agree,” Aliana smiled as she laid down a card, bringing her total to twenty, “What’s the point in being rich if there’s no thrill?”

The Codebreakers eyes widened a fraction before smiling and personally sliding his stack of chips in front of Aliana. “Well played, my dear.”

“Thank you,” Aliana nodded her head, “I like a challenge in everything. Battle, games.”

“Men?”

“Women,” Aliana smirked.

“Ah, a real challenge then,” The Codebreaker said.

Poe remained silent throughout this entire exchange, casting glances over at Aliana who acted and carried herself completely different from the woman who had so casually murdered aristocrats only an hour ago. And that had seemed so different to the Sith who had been worried sick about Rey before Ilum. In fact, the entire display before him carried such a rehearsed charisma to it that he was starting to believe many of Aliana's more aggressive tendencies were just an act that she had perfected over her life.

“So are you on Canto Bight for business or pleasure?” The Codebreaker asked.

“Business, my pleasure is waiting for me back at the fleet,” Aliana’s smirk became a warm smile as she stared down at her cards, thinking about the Jedi waiting for her back on the Raddus, “Specifically I’m looking for someone who can break the docking frequencies of a First Order ship.”

“Then I take it our meeting wasn’t an accident?” the Codebreaker mused, turning in his seat to face Aliana. “Unless, you aren’t familiar with my trade?”

“Maz Kanata referred you to us,” Poe said, breaking his silence.

“Ah, that dame,” the other man said, his tone taking an air of nostalgia. “So what sort of nut do you need cracked.”

“The lead ship of a First Order assault fleet has found a way to track ships through lightspeed,” Aliana explained, “I need to get through the shield frequencies and the docking codes, and then shut down that lightspeed tracker.”

“And what ship is it?”

“The Supremacy.”

The table was silent for a beat.

“...No,” he said flatly.

“Whu-? What do you mean no?” Poe asked, dumbfounded.

“I said I appreciate a challenge. I do not appreciate suicide,” explained the Codebreaker. “Seeking certain death is bad for business.”

“And what exactly makes the Supremacy suicide?” Aliana asked curiously.

“You’re the Force user. You tell me,” the Codebreaker said with an unamused look. “Turbolasers ready to vaporize any ship that isn’t verified, a legion of elite death troopers inside, not to mention those select few who could crush someone’s lungs with their minds or whatever you folk do. The entire ship has deathwish written on every visible surface. Therefore, my answer is no.”

“Shame,” Aliana whistled, “You could have had your name on a piece of galactic history.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I’m not just going there to disable a tracker,” Aliana smirked, “I’m also going to kill Snoke.”

The Codebreaker's eyes narrowed at Aliana. "The Supreme Leader of the First Order? You can do that?" he asked disbelievingly. "Can't say I'm an expert on you Force types, but that still sounds like something beyond your paygrade, missy."

"Nothing is beyond the paygrade of the Dark Lady of the Sith," Aliana narrowed her eyes.

A scoff left the Codebreaker's throat in response. "And I know a bluff when I see one, dear," he said. "The Sith died out years ago."

"Don't believe everything you hear," Aliana smirked as she gripped her lightsaber and activated it, bathing the table in a red glow.

The surrounding tables were alerted by the unusual sound that rang in the air before recoiling in reflexive terror from the sight of the crimson blade. Security guards ran from the doors they were stationed by to encircle the table, stun sticks armed and ready. Poe's eyes darted around nervously, cursing at himself for not bringing his blaster. "Aliana, put the piece away," he said under his breath.

"Oh please, you'll be fine," Aliana smirked as she flourished her lightsaber, "So, are you sure you don't want in... Master Codebreaker?"

The man sat up from his seat, adjusting his carnation before taking both ladies by their waist. "It's always important to know when to fold," he said before walking through the gap left by the security guards.

Aliana cocked an eyebrow, before shrugging and deactivating her lightsaber. She glanced around at the security guards, who were posturing and trying to look intimidating, "If you value your lives, you'll clear out," she said coldly.

One guard responded by advancing on the two, stun stick raised high to bring down onto Aliana's skull. "Look out!" Poe shouted before jumping from his seat in between the two. He grabbed the guard's wrist, twisting it in a swift motion so that his arm was pinned against his back.

At once, the other guards advanced as well, locking their sights on both Aliana and Poe. With an almost bored sigh, Aliana lifted her hand into the air and a torrent of lightning shot out at every angle to strike each guard. They all convulsed for a few seconds before Aliana cut the current and they fell to the ground in a scattered heap.

They were dead.

Aliana took the credits she'd won from the Codebreaker and dropped them into the hand of the dealer as she stood up, "Sorry about the mess."

The dealer was wide eyed and speechless, being able to do nothing but gawk as Aliana grabbed Poe by the arm and ran out of the casino with unnatural speed. As soon as they were clear of the casino, she slowed to a brisk walk back to the shuttle.

"Well, that was a wash," Poe scoffed, "No Codebreaker, and now a bounty is sure to go on our heads."

"We wouldn't have had the Codebreaker anyway," Aliana shrugged, "Once he heard the Supremacy, he shriveled like he was in a cold pool."

A pair of speeders zoomed past the two before turning to obstruct their path to the ship. They guards flashed spotlights onto Aliana and Poe as they approached. “Stop right there! You two are-” the guard shouting into his speaker was cut off when Aliana gripped both speeders with the Force and crushed them together. The crumpled mass of bleeding burning metal dropped hard into the sand in front of their transport.

“Well that was annoying,” she said with a huff. “C’mon.”

“Okay, this is a new side of you that I’m not sure I like,” Poe said as he glanced around at the burning and twisted metal, “Where did all of this come from?”

“That would be the ‘Darth’ in ‘Darth Amorosa,’” Aliana smirked as she led them back to the shuttle, “I may be cordial, but I’m still Sith.”

“Duly noted. You’re still not a pilot though, so let me at the controls,” Poe said, sitting down in front of the controls. After flipping the necessary switches and clutching the throttle, he got the shuttle airborne. There were either no security guards left to try and pursue them or else none left that were willing to try as they managed to leave the planet’s atmosphere without worry.

As they jumped to lightspeed to return to the fleet, Poe turned an exasperated look to Aliana, “Well, *Dark Lady*, what are we supposed to do now? How are we going to get on the Supremacy without a codebreaker?”

Aliana was rather relaxed as she sat in the co-pilot’s seat, inspecting her nails, “If I recall correctly, the First Order themselves have handed us a golden opportunity to get into the ship without raising an alarm,” she smirked.

Poe arched a brow at Aliana. “What do you mean?” he pressed.

“Remember the transmission we got on our way out?” Aliana asked, “The First Order is trying to barter for my surrender.”

“What does that ha-” Poe trailed off, his eyes wide with realization. “...You’re kidding.”

“What better way to bypass docking codes than to just fly the Fury in like it’s any old spaceport,” Aliana smirked, “You guys can get the tracker offline, while I get an easy shot to the throne room to kill Snoke.”

“...And you’re sure this falls under the ‘Fight smarter’ lesson we were having earlier today?” Poe asked, feeling unconvinced. “Because it feels like we’re maybe skipping a step or two here.”

“The fleet escapes, and the Supreme Leader dies,” Aliana explained, “Unless the Raddus gets destroyed, I can’t imagine any better outcome. The First Order is a fascist death cult. Without a ruler, they don’t know what to do.”

Poe processed the plan for a moment, letting it stew in his head before shrugging. “Alright, kriff it. I don’t have a better idea,” he admitted. “Let’s get a message out to the fleet. Let them know the situation.”

“Rey’s not gonna be too happy about this, that’s for sure,” Aliana whistled.

“Hand me the condenser coil!” Rey yelled from inside the access hatch to the shield generator, “I think I can amplify the rear shields to absorb more turbolaser fire!”

Rose was already tossing the coil over to the hatch, knowing that Rey would catch it with her mind. The object floated down until Rey was able to grab it in her hand. After a moment of rustling, she fastened the coil to the power relay. Almost immediately, the hum of the generator felt a little stronger.

“There!” Rey said, climbing out of the hatch. “I think this ship could take dreadnought fire to it’s stern now. Not that I want to test that.”

“I don’t know how you did that,” Rose said as she grabbed Rey’s hand and pulled her up onto the deck, “It’s like you rebuilt an entire shield generator from scratch while it was still running.”

“It helps when I have someone like you to familiarize me with the equipment,” Rey said, placing a hand on Rose’s shoulder. “I don’t think I would have done this as quickly as I did without your help.”

Rose giggled and busied herself with another console, “Well now I can see how you managed to seduce a Sith Lord,” she snickered.

“By being tech literate?” Rey asked coyly. “Yeah, that is kind of how it started, I won’t lie,” she said with a laugh. “We met when she asked me to fix her hyperdrive.”

“See where I come from, when a pretty girl asks you to fix her hyperdrive, she isn’t talking about the ship,” Rose said as she ran through a list of other damaged components in the Raddus, looking for the next repair job.

“Oh I got a fair share of those back on Jakku as well,” Rey said. “But they weren’t from pretty girls and resulted in the butt of my staff in their groin.”

“Gross,” Rose shook her head, “Is that how you learned to rig together ship upgrades? Taking apart ships while scavenging?”

“That and the few odd jobs of maintenance I’ve had now and then,” Rey said. “When you know how things come apart, you learn how to put them back together, sometimes better than before.”

“You could modify entire ships with the skills you have,” Rose whistled as she pulled up the manifest for the starboard turbolasers, “Custom-fitted corvettes with high-powered weapons and shields that can eat a death star laser.”

“Oh come on,” Rey said, her cheeks turning pink. “I can’t be any better than the specialists you guys have.”

“We have specialists, but none with your resourcefulness,” Rose remarked as she admired Rey, “You can fix ships with scrap. I’ve never seen that kind of talent before.”

Rey smiled sheepishly as she fidgeted with her hands. “Well, I’m glad I can help. Thank you Rose. It feels nice to have my scavenging skill set being praised like this.”

“Aliana hasn’t praised you for any of this?” Rose asked, tilting her head.

“Sorry, I meant being praised by someone who wasn’t so tragically tech illiterate,” Rey clarified with a smirk.

“Is she really that bad?”

“She once wrestled with a fuel converter, not realizing that it was locked,” Rey explained.

Rose nearly choked on her laughter. The sudden noise startling BB-8 from the wiring job he was doing. He wheeled around and started beeping angrily.

“Sorry buddy,” Rey knelt down and patted his dome, “Didn’t mean to spook you.”

BB-8 beeped cheerfully, leaning into Rey’s hand before turning and resuming his work.

Rose had finally managed to contain herself, but the ridiculousness of Rey’s story continued to make the occasional chuckle run through her, “Okay, seriously? She was that hopeless?”

“Pretty much,” Rey nodded. “With 2V managing most of the ship when she had the parts, the only thing she had to worry about tech wise was her lightsaber. But let me tell you, what she lacks as a mechanic, she more than makes up for as a cook,” she added with a whimsical look on her face.

“Oooh, really?” Rose asked, sitting down on a crate and listening intently.

“Oh my god, she even manages to make ration packs taste delicious!” Rey exclaimed. “I didn’t know there could be anything with that much flavor before I tasted her cooking! You absolutely have to try her cushnip when she gets back! It is to die for!”

“Remind me to do that!” Rose grinned, “So let’s see... can’t do tech, CAN cook, what else?”

“What do you mean?”

“C’mon Rey, what else about her gets your heart racing?” Rose asked, sitting forward with her chin in her hands, “I’ve seen you two together, you’re like you’re in a trance.”

Rey felt her cheeks grow a darker shade of red as her gaze fell to the floor. “Oh, I don’t know... I mean, when she pulls me into a tight hug it feels especially nice. Oh! And the way she curls into me when we’re sleeping is just so adorable. I love it! Um, she’ll sometimes walk with more of a saunter when she catches me looking at her. She has such a beautiful laugh. She always smells like roses and cinnamon making her kisses feel pretty spicy and... and I’m rambling aren’t I?” she asked sheepishly.

Rose had the biggest grin on her face as she held her hand over her heart, “Rey, that’s so beautiful! You sound so in love!”

Rey her cheeks begin to ache with how much she had been smiling just thinking about it. “I do, don’t I?” she asked. “It’s funny. Before her, I never really thought about being in love. I mean, I had nebulous ideas about starting a family somewhere down the line, but never any concrete thoughts. With Alie, though? I can barely imagine a future without her.”

“You’re living the dream, Rey!” Rose cooed, “You’ve found someone who makes you blush just by thinking about her, in the middle of war no less! And she’s a Sith while you’re a Jedi! How many times does that even happen?”

“From what I learned studying ancient Jedi and Sith texts, once before,” Rey answered. “They were even Aliana’s ancestors. Go figure.”

“Must run in the family. Lucky for you,” Rose laughed.

“Heh, yeah.” Rey said, leaning against the wall. “I’ll admit, I didn’t take the news of her being a Sith very well. Or rather, I didn’t take the fact that she hid that fact from me very well. Even so, she’s been such an amazing friend, even when I was trying to keep her at a distance. She’s done more for me than any one person I’ve known in my life. I wouldn’t be where I am today without her. She’s so dependable, loyal, smart, beautiful, funny. I... I can’t get enough of her.”

“I’m so jealous,” Rose smiled, patting Rey’s leg, “Do you think this might be... ya know... forever?”

Rey paused for a moment as she pondered the question. “I mean... I can’t imagine wanting to spend forever with anyone else, really,” she said with a shrug. “Aliana’s just... just too perfect.”

“That’s the sweetest thing I’ve-”

Rose was cut off when an alarm blared throughout the engine room, startling both women and sending Rose to the floor.

‘INTRUDER ALERT! FIRST ORDER FIGHTER HAS DOCKED IN HANGAR BAY 2!’

“What!? How!?” Rose asked herself, confusion etched onto her face.

“...Oh, kriff,” Rey hissed as she broke into a sprint out of the engine room. She had a sinking feeling that she knew who the intruder was. A sinking feeling she would soothe by driving her lightsaber into the intruder’s gut.

She tore up the ship, weaving in and out of scrambling crew members and trying to make it to the hangar bay as quickly as possible. She felt lighter, faster, and more easily propelled through the air than she normally did as she let the Force flow through her. It was exhilarating. Was she using the Force to run faster? She didn’t even know she could do that. It seemed that Force augmentation had more applications than she originally thought.

The people she ran past were little more than a blur, her body shifted and swerved around obstacles in her path without even thinking. She felt intuned with the Force in a way that felt wholly unique from her previous bouts in training. Whatever this feeling was, she was hoping it would serve her well in the coming battle ahead.

She slid to a halt in one corridor. A tall dark clad figure faced away from her wielding a red lightsaber. The familiar mop of black hair atop his head confirmed Rey’s suspicions.

“You made a mistake coming here,” Rey said, drawing her weapon.

“There is no mistake, Jedi,” Kylo Ren snarled as he drew his lightsaber, “I’m here for you and your Sith pet.”

“Alie isn’t in right now,” Rey said igniting the lightsaber Aliana had gifted her. “So you’ll just have to lose to me instead.”

As Rey was igniting her lightsaber, Leia and Amilyn came hurrying down the corridor to see who had boarded the ship, “Rey! Are you alri-...” Amilyn trailed off when she realized who was on the ship.

“You can’t win this time,” Kylo Ren sneered, ignoring the other two women, “I’ve become stronger since Ilum.”

“And you can’t dig around in my mind anymore,” Rey snapped back as she charged, flipping over Kylo Ren’s head and striking from the apex of her jump, which was clumsily parried.

Kylo took several steps back as Rey landed on her feet, shifting her stance into one he almost didn’t recognize. She advanced on the Dark Jedi with strikes far swifter and precise than he was familiar with. His swings scarred the walls and floor of the corridor, sending sparks flying about that he hoped would disorient Rey enough for him to find an opening, but to know avail. He attempted a full offensive, hoping to overwhelm the Jedi with power as well as speed, but Rey’s form shifted again allowing her to swat his strikes away with relative ease. His strikes were enough to keep her on her back foot momentarily, but no more. Soon after, Rey’s defensive blocks turned into precise counterattacks. Her form then became something Kylo Ren actually recognized. It was the preferred form of Luke Skywalker, Form V. Even so, his familiarity offered him no advantage as Rey’s strikes resulted in him being the one to lose ground.

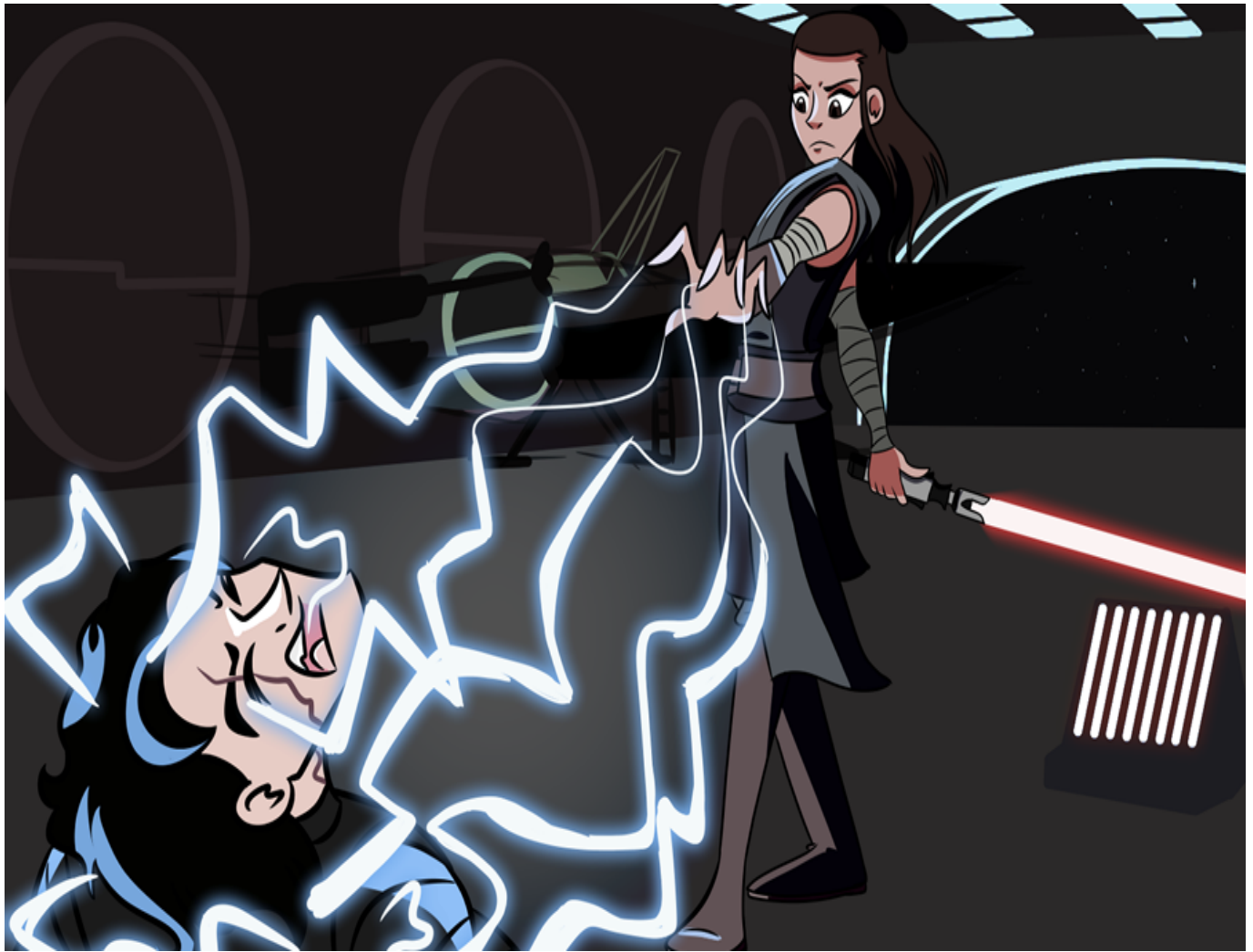
Rey slowly pushed him back toward the hangar bay wall, slowly and systematically cutting him off from room to attack. Ren’s form was still as sloppy as ever, and while he was faster on the draw than he had been on Ilum, he was still trying to overwhelm with power attacks, something Aliana had taught Rey to take advantage of. As she parried another overhead strike, she tilted her lightsaber and brought the tip in the graze against Kylo’s chin, sending him reeling back into the wall.

He managed to stay on feel despite the pain, but that did him no favor as Rey’s lightsaber was now dangerously close to his neck. He was so stunned by whatever it was that she just did that it took him a moment to realize his situation.

“How many times do I have to beat you before you just accept you’ve been had?” Rey asked him in annoyance.

Kylo Ren only grew more impotently angry as he tried to regain his balance, “No! I refuse to be beaten by a girl who-”

Whatever he’d been about to say would remain a mystery as Rey extended a hand and a torrent of lightning shot from her fingertips and into Kylo Ren’s body. He fell on the floor and writhed in agony, his lightsaber rolling uselessly away from his hand.



Rey felt a smile creep onto her lips. By the Force this felt good. “Refuse all you want. It doesn’t change reality,” she said, ice in her tone. Her hand turned upward, lifting Kylo’s weak, smoking figure off of the floor. Slowly, she walked over to his ship, pulling him along. As they reached it, she waved her free hand, opening the hatch to his interceptor before throwing him inside. “Run back to your master,” Rey said dismissively. “Tell him that we expect better from his apprentice now.”

As soon as the ship was closed, she lifted the entire fighter with the Force and threw it out into space, smirking as it spun and rolled. She wondered how long it would be adrift before either the First Order retrieved him, or he managed to pull the controls together. She had wanted to kill him, but there was something viscerally satisfying about leaving him humiliated and broken a second time.

Her thoughts were taken away from Kylo Ren when she suddenly heard cheers and applause erupt in the hangar. Resistance fighters poured in from the door to hoot and holler in congratulations. Rey’s demeanor of vindictive glee shifted into one of bashfulness as she awkwardly stepped towards the mass of applause before her. Finn stepped toward her, a look of awe on his face that she’d never seen him with before.

“Rey, that was... how did you do that?” he asked, astounded by what he’d just seen.

“I trained hard?” Rey smiled, brushing her hair behind her ear, “I had a good teacher.”

“You’re not kidding,” Finn said with a wide grin.

The cheering remained thunderous even as Amilyn and Leia stepped through the crowd over to Rey.

“It’s good to see all those months of Jedi training have paid off,” Amilyn said with a fond smile.

“I’m not sure I would call what I just saw ‘Jedi training,’ Admiral,” Leia said, looking far less enthused. “Rey, when did you learn to use Force Lightning?”

“...A while ago?” Rey replied. “Aliana showed me how.”

“Why? What use would a Jedi have for such a heinous Dark Side technique?” Leia pressed.

“I saw her use it for a lot of things,” Rey shrugged as the rest of the Resistance filed out of the hangar and back to their posts, not eager to see the General potentially lose it again, “Starting the campfire, jumpstarting the Fury’s engines, now that I think about it she’s used it for mundane applications more than combat.”

“It’s still not becoming of you and I wouldn’t encourage you to use it,” Leia said with a frown. “Especially the way you did. It was clear that you bested B- ...Kylo Ren without trouble. You didn’t need to torture him like that.”

“And he didn’t need to torture me, but look where we are,” Rey narrowed her eyes.

“The point is,” Amilyn interjected, “Kylo Ren was pushed back before he could do any serious damage. I would like to thank you for your service to the Resistance today, Commander.”

Rey’s expression softened and she smiled at Amilyn, “Thank you, Admiral.”

“You mentioned Amorosa wasn’t on the ship. Where is she?”

As Rey opened her mouth to speak, her personal holocom started beeping loudly. “Oh! That, uh, that might be her right now, actually,” Rey said with an awkward smile, “If you’ll excuse me.” Rey cut her way through the crowd before darting behind a corner, silently relieved to be away from all the eyes fixed onto her. After taking a deep relaxing breath, she reached for the com attached to her belt and answered it. “Hey, Alie,” she greeted. “What’s the status?”

“Mission failed,” Aliana explained, “The Codebreaker got scared at the idea of boarding the Supremacy. So I’m going to smuggle everyone onto the ship under the guise of surrender.”

Rey’s eyes widened. “I’m sorry, you’re going to what!?” she asked. “Aliana, you have to understand how risky that is!”

“Oh, and sneaking on board with a computer whiz is somehow safer?” Aliana scoffed, “Rey, this was going to be risky regardless.”

“Well yeah, but...” Rey trailed off. “I just... don’t like the idea of you throwing yourself at their mercy. It doesn’t seem right. My brain just thinks about all the ways it could go wrong for you.”

“Well you’re more than welcome to come to the bridge with me,” Aliana laughed, “Hux wants you just as much as he wants me.”

Rey felt a resolute expression grow on her face. “Well, then he’s going to get the both of us then,” she said with a nod. “I’m not letting you face the First Order alone.”

“I wouldn’t have it any other way, love,” Aliana blew her a kiss before cutting the transmission.

Rey leaned against the wall before sliding onto the floor, holding the holocom close to her chest. Even over a transmission, it felt so good to hear from Aliana again. Her voice was so soothing, it could make all of Rey’s worries just melt away.

Leia stepped forward, putting a cold bucket of water onto Rey’s happiness, “Master Codebreaker? What is she up to now?”

Rey sighed and picked herself up from the floor. “Okay so, here’s the situation,” she began. “Aliana, Finn, Rose Tico, Captain Dameron and I were brainstorming ways on how to get away from the First Order’s pursuit. Our plan was to find someone who could break the First Order’s access codes and allow us to sneak onto the Supremacy and turn off the tracker they used to find us in Hyperspace. We didn’t want to tell High Command because we didn’t want to get anyone’s hopes up if this plan fell through... which it kind of has, but we have a new plan in the works.”

“Oh I’m absolutely giddy with anticipation,” Leia said sarcastically, “What is this new plan?”

Rey took a deep breath, trying not to let Leia’s antagonistic words or her own anxiety about Aliana’s idea visibly distress her. “She’s going to turn herself over to the First Order to get us inside the flagship.”

Leia’s combative expression dropped instantly to be replaced by one of bewilderment, “What?”

“She’s going to surrender to the First Order as cover to let us onto the flagship,” Rey explained, “From there, we shut down the hyperspace tracker and then get out.”

“That’ll be suicide for her,” Leia said, unable to process what she was hearing.

“She assures me that she’ll be able to make it back with us as we escape,” Rey offered, “...I’m just... not sure it will work. I hope it does, and we’re out of other options, but...” she trailed off, the worry about the situation starting to show on her face.

“Rey?” Leia said, kneeling down in front of her. She laid a hand on her chin and nudged the younger woman to look at her, “What is it?”

Rey swallowed the lump in her throat and spoke barely above a whisper. “...I’m scared I’m going to lose her, Leia,” she said, almost meekly. “I know it’s very... un-Jedi of me, but I can’t help it. I love her so much.”

Leia swallowed the icy retort that had already come pre-prepared. Despite having adopted a less antagonistic approach toward Amorosa, she still didn’t fully trust her. She probably never would. And she certainly didn’t understand what Rey saw in the Sith to be so attached to her. “Rey... I’m sorry, but it’s a possibility. She’s taking a huge risk doing this.”

Rey resisted a wince. She knew what Leia said was true, and it certainly wasn’t comforting. The thought filled her with such absolute dread that she despised herself for even dwelling on it. Still, it was a reality of war. “...I know,” she said softly.

Leia didn't know what to say. She didn't know if there was anything she could say. She was still trying to process the fact that Amorosa would surrender herself for the chance to get away from the First Order safely, "When do you expect them back?"

"By tomorrow I suppose," Rey said. "We should still have some time to refine the plan when they return. Perhaps there are some precautions we can take to make sure she'll be ok."

"If she's surrendering to Snoke, there's probably little we can do that she hasn't already done herself," Leia shook her head, "I think for now you should make sure Finn is brushed up on his lightsaber skills."

"That sounds like a good idea, actually," Rey said, her hand running along the length of her own lightsaber absentmindedly. "The more capable we are on that ship, the better off we'll be."

The shuttle touched down into the Raddus' hangar with a heavy clunk, leaving the two pilots shaken. Aliana took her hands off the controls and slid away from them, half terrified and half impressed.

"Well, on the plus side I landed the shuttle," she said sheepishly.

Poe looked over at Aliana from his seat, slightly disheveled and more than slightly on edge. "...Yeah... you sure did," he said, exasperated. "Nearly gave me a damned heart attack, but you landed the shuttle."

Aliana huffed as she lowered the docking ramp and prepared to step back onto the Raddus properly... whereupon she was immediately tackled at full speed by a highly excitable Jedi.

Her feet skidded across the hangar bay floor slightly with the force she was just subjected to. However, she managed to keep her footing and in fact returned the hug that was thrust upon her. Wrapping her arms around Rey's waist, Aliana used the momentum they two had gathered to spin her in the air once or twice before lowering her back onto stable ground.

"Hey you," Aliana said with a huff of laughter. "Miss me?"

"You have no idea, I think I might have a problem," Rey grinned as she kissed Aliana's cheek repeatedly, "Next time I'm going with you, I don't care what objections you have!"

"You will hear no objection from me," Aliana replied, burying her face into Rey's neck. "Spending all that time alone with this flyboy made me realize just how terribly I missed you too."

"Thanks," Poe said sarcastically.

"Well I would have enjoyed it more if you didn't get so huffy about rich people dying," Aliana scoffed, "Lightweight. Can take on a dreadnought, but heaven forbid I do a little neck breaking."

Rey gave Aliana a look of confusion. "...Alie, did you kill the Master Codebreaker?" she asked, careful not to sound too accusatory.

"Not him, but a taskmaster, about thirty billionares, and twelve security guards," Aliana recounted, "No wait! Fourteen security guards."

A Jedi was never meant to find any form of happiness in violence and death. Despite that particular teaching, Rey couldn't resist a small smile curling on her lips. "I'm sure Rose will love to hear that story," she mused.

"Oh she'll be dancing across the engine room for three days straight," Aliana snickered, bringing Rey closer and kissing her softly.

Rey returned the kiss gleefully, savoring the taste of Aliana's lips that she had missed so dearly. "We had a bit of excitement over here too," Rey said. "Kylo Ren managed to get onto the ship, but I fought him back."

Aliana's hands unconsciously tightened on Rey's shoulders, "What happened?!"

"He got aboard the ship, making a lot of noise as he is prone to do," Rey said dismissively. "I caught him just outside the hangar bay and forced him back. He was definitely stronger than he was back on Illum. Of course, so was I. And better trained" The smile on Rey's face shifted into something slightly more devious. "He didn't seem to appreciate me using Force Lightning on him."

Aliana's face lit up at that, "You used Lightning? Really?" she asked, "Rey, that's incredible!"

"Leia didn't seem to think so, but I didn't hear any other complaints on the matter so I didn't mind," Rey said with an easy smile. "It... it felt nice, you know? To finally know for sure that I can handle him on my own. It was... relieving."

Aliana grinned and squeezed Rey tightly, "I'm so proud of you! You've come so far in just a few short months!"

Rey squeezed back, kissing Aliana's cheek. "It helps that I had such an amazing teacher."

"Luke Skywalker?" Poe guessed in jest as he began bringing supplies out of the shuttle.

Rey responded with a small display of the Force, making Poe's feet fall out from under him, sending him to the floor.

"Ow! What the hell!?" Poe asked indignantly.

"The new Jedi Order does not tolerate anyone being asses, Captain Dameron," Rey said matter of factly.

"What did I say?" Poe asked, looking bewildered.

Aliana and Rey only smiled and left the hangar, hands clasped tightly together as they longed for a good rest before the mission tomorrow.

Chapter End Notes

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Let the Past Die

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

There was a buzz around High Command as the Resistance Leaders all met for a briefing on Aliana's crazy plan for an escape. Upon hearing that they had a way out, everyone was ecstatic and the thought of no longer having to burn fuel keeping at a distance and getting to actual safety gave everyone on the Raddus and surrounding support cruisers hope. As Aliana stepped onto the bridge with the rest of High Command, she could feel the energy in the room. The way the entire bridge had become far more lively and moved with more purpose than ever before. She had to admit that it felt good to have been the cause of such motivation.

"General," she nodded to Leia, then to the others, "Admirals."

Rey stepped forward beside Aliana, resisting the urge to reach for the Sith's hand as she spoke. "We believe we have a way to finally shake the First Order off of our trail, allowing us to jump to Hyperspace safely."

The room became filled with low muttering, the air of the war room being cautiously hopeful.

"It's come to my attention that in my absence, General Hux contacted High Command, offering to let the Resistance go in exchange for my surrender," Aliana said. "I plan to give them what they want."

The room was then filled with murmurs of confusion, though it only took Aliana lifting her hand to silence them.

"I'm going to take a small strike force on the Fury to board the Supremacy under the guise of surrender. While Hux and his guards escort me to Snoke, my team will sneak onto the ship and locate the hyperspace tracker. They will disable it, whereupon the fleet will have to immediately jump to lightspeed. The rest of us will escape in the Fury if possible and meet at the planet of Crait," Aliana brought the planet up on the holoterminal, "According to General Organa, there's an old Rebel base there to hide until the First Order gives up their search. From there, refuel and find a new site for a base."

"You really think this will work?" Admiral Ackbar asked.

"Admittedly it's a riskier gambit than most others, but we don't have many other alternatives, if any," Aliana replied. "To better the odds of success, we'll need to make sure that our strike force is composed of our most capable. Naturally, Rey will be leading the strike force while I try to keep Snoke's attention focused on me. If High Command has any recommendations, we will hear them now."

"Miss Tico," Amilyn suggested almost immediately, "She has a knack for ship systems and could probably disable the tracker, along with you Rey."

"I'm going too," Poe nodded, "No way I'm letting you board the Supremacy without backup."

“No arguments from us,” Rey said with a smile before turning to Finn. “How about you, Finn? Ready to test that lightsaber of yours on the First Order?”

“Thought that went without saying,” Finn said with a smile.

Rey’s smile grew wider as she looked around the room, “Alright. This time we’re taking down a dreadnought.”

Everything was set, the Fury was boarded and departing from the hangar. Aliana had decided to radio from the Fury so as to arouse the least suspicion possible. With a gentle squeeze to Rey’s hand, she finally stepped in front of the holoterminal.

“This is Darth Amorosa of the Sith Warship, Fury to General Hux,” she said as the channel opened.

Hux came into view on the holoterminal. His expression was even with just a hint of dourness. “This is General Hux,” he replied. “What is the purpose of this transmission, Sith?”

“I wasn’t on the Raddus when you made your transmission to General Organa,” Aliana explained, “I’ve heard about your offer to let the Resistance go in exchange for my surrender.”

Hux blinked in surprise before a skeptical expression crossed his face. “And why is that?” he asked. “I didn’t take you to be the kind of person to give yourself up willingly. That would go against your way of life, I suspect.”

“There are many things about the Sith that both yourself and General Organa wouldn’t expect,” Aliana replied, deciding to be honest, “I have people I love on that ship, and I would gladly buy them a few more months of life if I could.”

Hux was silent for a beat before a pleased smile spread across his thin lips. “Well, it’s good to know that there are... beings like yourself that can see reason,” he said with a smarmy grin. “You will be cleared to land aboard the Supremacy, at which point you will be taken before the Supreme Leader. He shall decide your fate.”

Aliana nodded and cut the transmission without a goodbye. She turned to Rey and the others as she took a deep breath to steady her nervousness, “Now or never, isn’t it? They’re not going to let the fleet go, so if this doesn’t work then we’ll have to rely on Holdo’s backup plan. Everybody ready?”

Finn, Poe and Rose all nodded, their weapons at the ready. Rey meanwhile seemed less than certain. “I should be there with you,” she said plainly. “Snoke couldn’t pass up the idea of having us both at his mercy.”

“You’re needed at the tracker first,” Aliana assured her, cupping her cheek, “It’ll be heavily guarded and we need your tech wizardry to get it down. Then you can come rushing to my rescue.” She smiled and leaned in to kiss her forehead.

Rey felt comforted by Aliana’s touch, leaning into it. “You know I will,” she said softly. “I’m not leaving that ship without you.”

Aliana smiled and glanced down at the pristine, new lightsaber hanging off Rey’s belt. She’d brought back Stygium crystals from Canto Bight to see if they would suit Rey’s lightsaber. Not only had she loved the way they looked like the sunsets on Jakku, but the fact that they were a gift

from her made them perfect for her lightsaber and Rey had finished it in a single night. It was actually a pair of lightsabers attached together on a locking hinge coupler. With a simple flick, it was ready to serve as an extremely deadly saberstaff.

“Time to bloody your new weapon,” Aliana smiled, kissing Rey softly.

Rey relished in the small comfort Aliana provided. Her nerves certainly needed it.

“Pardon, Alie?” 2V said from inside the cockpit. “We are boarding the Supremacy now.”

Aliana nodded as she walked into the cockpit. Looking out the viewport, she could see the hangar bay to the massive ship come into view. Soon the bright lights of the hanger were all encompassing as the Fury landed inside. Feeling the ship touchdown onto the floor, Aliana made her way to the airlock. She gave one final look at Rey as she and the group hung back, giving her a warm smile. “This will work,” she said softly before resuming down to the airlock.

“I love you,” Rey whispered as she and the others took their positions to wait for a search party to storm the ship. The plan was set. Rey would mind-trick any Stormtrooper that came on board to tell them they saw nothing, and with the shield on her mind she would be almost impossible for Kylo Ren to sense her. Hopefully, Aliana would keep Snoke busy enough to not even try to search for them with the Force.

Now, all they could do was wait for the all clear.

“I must say, the capture of a Sith Lord will certainly brighten spirits on the ship,” Hux smiled as Amorosa was brought to him in cuffs, “Her lightsaber?”

“She didn’t have it with her, General,” the trooper said, “She came unarmed.”

Hux narrowed his gaze at Aliana who simply shrugged.

“I knew it would do me no good against the Supreme Leader,” she said. “I left it with the Jedi as a memento to remember me when I’m gone.”

“How... sentimental of you,” Hux said with no small amount of disdain, but nevertheless satisfied with her answer. “This way,” he said, turning towards the hanger back doors, the two troopers ushering Aliana forward.

“So... now you have me,” Aliana said, “What about the fleet?” She knew it was pointless to ask. Hux had no intention of letting the Resistance go, and even he knew that bargaining for Aliana’s surrender was a longshot that just happened to pay off.

“We shall wait to hear the Supreme Leader pass judgement before we consider the bargain fulfilled,” Hux said with a rehearsed ease. “Worry not. Your rebel friends will live to fight another day. Just without you, I imagine.”

“I’m sure they will,” Aliana said as Hux led her to the Throne Room elevator. Ap’lek gave a chuckle at the sight of Aliana in handcuffs, to which Aliana narrowed her eyes and watched as Ap’lek struggled to breathe, “Don’t get too comfortable, Knight. I don’t need hands to kill you.”

The troopers pressed their blasters into Aliana's back, silently ordering her to stop. Hux gave them a sharp look before they lowered their weapons before turning his gaze back to the Knight.

"Ap'lek, behave yourself in front of our guest," he said before looking back at Aliana.

Aliana released her grip and smirked at the Knight as she stepped onto the elevator. The troopers remained behind as the doors closed, leaving Aliana alone with the General.

"Looks like you have Ren's cronies under your boot," she remarked.

"I suppose I have you constantly grinding Kylo Ren under *your* boot to thank for that," Hux said plainly. "His incompetence so brazenly displayed to the Supreme Leader has made him more appreciative of my skills. Ren and his Knights all refer to me as a result, and the First Order is stronger for it."

Aliana shrugged, begrudgingly accepting that Leia had been right in some twisted fashion.

"Although I am curious," Hux continued, "A Sith as powerful as you would have easily advanced to a position of great power in the First Order. Why have you sided with the Resistance and the Jedi?"

"There is nothing the First Order can offer me," Aliana said plainly, "I have power, and after seeing what Snoke has trained I am not impressed."

She was only partially honest. She usually defaulted to many of the things about her the First Order would find distasteful. Her ancestry, her complexion, her preference for other women. These things would find her relegated to slave work, shoved into Stormtrooper armor, and either murdered or 'conditioned' respectively. But the biggest reason she had never considered joining the First Order was that she had no respect for the First Order. In her mind, they represented the weakness of Darth Bane's Order of the Sith Lords. The conniving power-plays, the ego of tyrants, the backstabbing, all of them she had seen in the First Order. The fact that a Dark Jedi as undisciplined and unbalanced as Kylo Ren could rise to a position of power was evidence to her that the First Order lacked strength of any kind.

Aliana had grown far stronger working beside Rey than she ever could have become here. She was the most powerful Force User in the galaxy, and would be until Rey realized her full potential. And the knowledge that she had a hand in training her filled her with an immense degree of pride. To train someone so powerful, to help her rise to a greater height than her, would make her the greatest Sith to have ever lived. That Rey would inevitably eclipse her was something she eagerly anticipated.

But further than that, and what Aliana considered far more important, was that she didn't just lack respect for the First Order. She despised it. A pack of tinpot dictators strutting around the galaxy as if they owned the place while enslaving and killing the people was despicable to her. The only thing more disgusting than this was the Republic, spending years appeasing the First Order and refusing to do anything about them. And of course they did, she thought bitterly. The Republic *also* had a stake in exploiting the galaxy for its own gain. For the benefit of its Senators and aristocrats who had so far seen none of the damage and hardship that the First Order was wreaking on the galaxy. Who was wreaking much of it themselves. All the while, innocents were caught in the crossfire.

Her mother had once tried to work with them. And they killed her for it. And that was a lesson that Aliana would never forget. Working with these cretins would do nothing but destroy her. If not

physically, it would destroy her spirit. Her sense of justice. Everything that she was. She would not sell her soul for power, and she would not bet her life and the lives of others on the supposed moral sense of people who benefited greatly from the exploitation of others.

“Perhaps meeting his Excellency in person will change your mind,” Hux replied. “If you’re lucky he will decide to bring you into the fold. He does seem in need of a more capable apprentice.”

The turbolift was silent for a moment before Hux continued. “Ah, and we will be sure to relieve you of your unbecoming tastes with some mental conditioning should that opportunity arise.”

And there it was. The ever-present threat of 'reconditioning' that she had come to expect from the First Order and the Empire before it. “I think I'll pass,” Aliana said coldly, turning a deadly glare to Hux as if daring him to try it, “I much prefer my *unbecoming* tastes.”

“It’s just as well. Snoke may very well decide to destroy you,” Hux said casually as the doors to the turbolift opened. The two walked into an expansive throne room, the black floor beneath them spotless and polished to a shine. A large bold red backdrop on the other end of the room was contrasted with the silhouettes of the darkly clad Knights of Ren as well as the throne on which Snoke resided.

Aliana stepped forward, thoroughly unimpressed, “Just two of your minions and Ren?” she asked, staring Snoke down, “Someone’s overconfident.”

Snoke let out a low, almost disturbingly carnal chuckle as he leaned forward on his throne. “There it is,” he said, his voice rumbling through the vast openness of the room. “There’s that classic Sith behavior. Even unarmed and surrounded by foes, you see yourself as holding all of the cards. It’s so refreshing to see when most others cower in my presence.”

“You haven’t really given me reason to fear you when I’ve seen the kind of useless dreg you’ve trained,” she said, turning a glare toward Kylo Ren and delighting in the fury she could feel coming off of him.

“Oh yes,” Snoke replied, rising from his seat to a clearly unnatural height before walking over to Aliana. As he approached, she could see how deeply grotesque his features were. His presence was truly unsightly, even disregarding the considerable power at his disposal. “You are quite the capable specimen aren’t you?” he asked, a decrepit, lanky hand reaching up to brush a curly lock of hair from Aliana’s face. “You’ve certainly had my attention these past few months. In all that time I’ve been considering what I would do with you once you were inevitably brought forth to me.”

“If I could make a suggestion,” Aliana said, curling her fingers, “Take your hand off of me.”

With a pull through the Force, Snoke’s hand was wrenched away from her face and pinned to his own side.

Snoke’s look of amusement swiftly became a displeased sneer. His free hand extended slightly, sending out a shockwave that sent Aliana several feet backwards. “Typical Sith,” he growled before turning back to return to his throne. “Thinking she could act in such a way in my domain. Whatever you hoped to accomplish here will not work. I have foreseen it.”

Aliana skidded to a halt, managing to stay on her feet as she glared Snoke down, “Be careful, Jedi. Every time you look at the future, it changes.”

Snoke's sneer remained on his face. "Such a binary way of thinking if you see everyone who is against you as Jedi. I share their nonsensical, obsolete beliefs of the Force no more than you do. I represent a future that is beyond such ancient things as the Jedi or the Sith. A new future for the Force. A future lead by it's Supreme Master and his selected champions. Those who do not share my vision, who cling to the past, shall perish with the sands of time."

"The Grey Jedi said the same thing. Zakuul said the same thing," Aliana rolled her eyes, "They were fools. Like you."

The throne room was dead silent. The Knights exchanged awkward glances before Snoke spoke once more. "I see you've chosen your complete and utter destruction at my hands then," he snarled. "But first, perhaps you'd like to see how complete your failure truly is."

His hand gestured in the position of an ocular display to Aliana's right. From inside that display, she could see the Resistance fleet taking fire from the First Order, one of the support ships exploding in a blazing inferno.

"There was no bargain to be made with them," Snoke said smugly. "The Resistance were foolish enough to take the bait we gave them and now they will suffer for ever having hoped of surviving against us."

Aliana looked out of the display at the fleet, and then turned away from it, "The only people I care about are far away from the fleet. The Resistance means nothing to me."

Hux and Kylo Ren glanced at each other, suddenly looking very concerned. Their concern turned to alarm when Aliana undid her shackles with the Force and rubbed her wrists.

"Did you really think I was that stupid?" she asked, stepping back into the center of the Throne Room, "I didn't come here to surrender. I came here to destroy you."

The two knights reflexively drew their weapons, igniting their crimson blades and slowly encircling Aliana. Snoke rose a hand up to keep them from attacking before fixing his gaze onto her. "Ah, so you got your pet Jedi away from the fleet did you?" Snoke mused. "Interesting. And where is she right now, I wonder?"

The Supreme Leader extended his hand and reached out with the Force to touch Aliana's mind. "Let's find out, shall we?"

Aliana was prepared for a mental attack on her mind, and started focusing her thoughts on random names, words and numbers with no discernable pattern. She'd learned this trick from an old holocron belonging to Darth Traya, to scatter one's own thoughts to make your mind almost impossible to read. But nonsense wasn't her only defense, as she put up several mental barriers and actively resisted Snoke's attempts to push into her mind. He would receive no intel from her, and waste his time trying to break her that he wouldn't so much as look at what was right under his own nose.

Snoke's expression turned from one of curiosity to frustration. He pushed harder through the Force only to feel more layers of resistance against him. When a layer of mental shielding wasn't countering his probing, a completely nonsensical thought was. His teeth clenched as he continued to push. "You. Will. Not. Deny. Me." he growled.

“I have a lot of experience in denying men, *Supreme Leader*,” she sneered, as she quietly wondered what was taking Rey so long.

Rey quietly drove her lightsaber into a Stormtrooper’s back before throwing him down a chasm, which the First Order had a nasty habit for putting into every ship and base they made. She wondered why they were so fixated on chasms, they were basically free body-hiding pits. As she guided the group forward, Finn and Poe kept watch on their backs.

“Finn, which way?” Rey asked as she looked at probably the second or third cross-section they’d encountered after sneaking off the Fury.

“On the right,” Finn said as he waved a hand to disable the security camera they remained just out of sight of before advancing. “Man that’s so cool!” he said, pleased with himself before returning to the task at hand. “But yeah. From there we take the turbo lift on the far end. It’s on the same level as the bridge, so stay frosty.”

“Stay frosty?” Rey turned back, looking bewildered, “When did you... you know what, never mind.”

As Rey led the group in the direction Finn indicated, they came to the turbolift and quickly hurried inside. They breathed a sigh of relief when the doors closed and they had a moment where they didn’t have to glance in every direction. Rey deactivated her lightsaber and leaned against the back wall. It wasn’t that she was tired, but she was just anxious. She hadn’t felt anything from Aliana since she was taken, and was hoping she was still alive. She would have felt it if she had died. At least she was sure she would.

Rose noticed the anxious look on her face and laid a hand on her shoulder, “I’m sure she’s okay.”

Rey snapped out of her thoughts to look over at Rose who was giving her a comforting look. Rey felt a small smile grow on her face before placing a hand on Rose’s shoulder in kind. “I know she will be. ...Thanks,” she said softly before turning her gaze to the turbolift doors. They were close. She could sense it. Not just to the tracker, but to the throne room.

As the doors opened, they hurried out and slipped down a narrow corridor. The bridge level was absolutely crawling with guards and officers, any one of whom could raise the alarm and blow their cover. Thankfully, the bridge level was also small and it didn’t take long to find the securely locked door that led to the Hyperspace tracker.

“Oh thank the Force,” Rey said, handing her lightsaber to Poe as she and Rose got to work manipulating the circuits.

“I don’t like this,” Finn said nervously, “It’s all just a little bit too easy...”

“That the Force telling you that or your own anxieties?” Poe asked, awkwardly holding the inactive weapon. “I feel like knowing that distinction is important.”

Rose fiddled with the wiring just beneath where Rey was tinkering with the door controls. “You got it?” she asked, her eyes darting around to make sure the corridor was still empty.

“Almost,” Rey said with a frown. “I just need... something to connect this last bit. A conductor or something.”

“A conductor,” Rose pondered before reaching down and pulling a medallion free from her neck. “Like this?”

Rey looked down to see what Rose was holding, her eyes widening in surprise. “Haysian ore! That’s perfect! You’re a lifesaver Rose!” she said, swiftly taking the medallion and placing it against the wiring of the controls. Immediately the door’s opened.

“Yes!” Rey exclaimed, handing the medallion back to Rose and grabbing her by the shoulders, “What would we do without you?” she asked, kissing her forehead. She let go of her and hurried into the tracker’s housing, leaving a far redder Rose behind with the others.

They stopped in front of the mechanism that appeared to be the hyperspace tracker. Finn looked at the device, his brow furrowed in thought. “Ok so... do we just destroy it?” he asked.

“You tell us,” Poe said. “First Order business is your area of expertise.”

“I wasn’t around when they came up with this, so I don’t know!” Finn responded indignantly.

“If we destroy it, the bridge will be warned that the tracking system has gone offline,” Rey informed them as she and Rose set about working with the tracker’s circuitry to figure out how it worked, “We have to disable it without bringing it completely offline. Just watch our backs, and don’t let any witnesses escape!”

“What’s going on he-” an officer stepping into the room managed to say before a blaster bolt slugged him in the throat.

Poe looked between the man he killed and his blaster. “You know... I feel like I should feel bad about shooting first, but I don’t.”

Finn readied his blaster toward the door, “They’d kill you without a second’s hesitation,” he said as he kept his eyes locked on the doorway.

Poe took notice of his stance and focus, and how his blaster had no quiver to it whatsoever. Sometimes he’d forgotten that Finn was trained from birth to be a soldier, and it was only in battle that he was reminded of that, “I know that, buddy.”

Finn glanced from the door over to Poe, offering a small smile before returning his gaze to the doorway.

Rey and Rose quickly removed the casing around the device and got to work sorting through the wiring. Rose was busy bypassing the alarms rigged onto the several pieces of circuitry as Rey set out to identify the kill switch.

“Good lord, they really did not want this thing to go offline,” Rose said as she cut off another flow of emergency power to the device.

“It’s using a static hyperspace field generator,” Rey said as she looked at the internal wiring and how it connected to the pulsing core of the device above, “It’s accelerating the calculation speeds of the tracking device to catch a ship’s position at lightspeed. If we simply shut down the field generator, the device is useless while still being registered as online.”

“Sounds simple when you put it like that,” Poe said, his gaze and blaster alternating between the different points of entry. “Can you do it, though?”

“As long as I can reach the right set of wires, it should be no issue,” Rey said as she reached her hand deep into the casing. Sadly, her arm wasn’t long enough to reach the device, so she had to settle for the Force as she tugged on the wires, “Rose, when it comes undone, I need you to pull that wire by your hand. It’ll disable the fluctuation alarm.”

Rose nodded and grasped the wire that Rey specified. “Got it. When you’re ready.”

“On three,” Rey said, “One... two... three!”

One series of wires were pulled from the device through the Force as another set were pulled by hand. The device appeared to remain online and no alarm was set off. But the hyperspace fields around the tracking device had ceased to function.

“Did it work?” Finn asked.

“It did,” Rey nodded in disbelief, “We have only a few minutes, signal the fleet the jump! Now!”

“This is Captain Dameron to the Raddus!” Poe said into his comm. “The tracker is disabled. You are clear to jump. Now get the hell out of here!”

“Understood,” Amilyn said through the comm. “We’ll see you on Crait, team. Thank you.”

Rey stood up and wiped her brow, relieved that one part of their mission was over. Taking her lightsaber back from Poe, she looked at them and smiled. “Get to the Fury, I have to...”

Finn, Poe and Rose nodded. “Go save your Sith,” Finn smiled.

“Thanks,” Rey grinned.

All eyes turned to the window as the Resistance Fleet jumped away. Even Snoke was momentarily distracted from his attempts to break into Aliana’s mind.

Another moment passed and Hux turned away from the scene playing before him and spoke into his comm. “Admiral, why are we not pursuing the fleet in Hyperspace?” he asked quietly but harshly. “...What do you mean you can’t! The tracker- Well send a team down to see what the problem is! Now!” He cut off the signal before taking a steadying breath. What was about to happen as a result of his words was not something he was looking forward to.

“Supreme Leader,” Hux said, turning back around. “It seems there was a... problem with the tracker. The Resistance jumped to Hyperspace before we could triangulate their path. We can’t find where they’re going.”

“I told you that you were overconfident,” Aliana smirked.

Snoke turned from the window where the Resistance fleet had once been, to the Sith smirking at him in the middle of the room. He stared her down, quietly seething. “I believe... we have been outplayed.”

Aliana lifted her hands to let out a slow series of claps that echoed throughout the throne room. “Well done, Supreme Leader,” she said with as much condescension as her voice could provide. “You finally realized something that I’ve only been trying to tell you since I stepped foot in this room. How marvelously cunning of you.”

Snoke had nothing to say. Amorosa had told him that he was overconfident when she first stepped onto the bridge. He had taken it to be a Sith bluff. In truth, the Sith was distracting him. Now that he was paying attention, he could sense the Jedi, the traitor, and two Resistance fighters fleeing from the tracker. He had made a grave error in thinking the Sith to be the greatest threat to the First Order, an error that Amorosa had been more than happy to exploit.

“Knights,” he said quietly, “Kill the Sith. Painfully. Humiliate her as she has humiliated me, and make her beg for death before you finally end her miserable life.”

The Knights advanced, Kylo Ren being slightly hesitant as he approached. Aliana shifted her stance as she readied herself for the incoming onslaught. The first Knight lunged, prompting her to sidestep his thrust. The second Knight slashed upward in a diagonal swing, giving Aliana just enough time to shift her weight and spin herself out of range. In a single fluid motion, she grabbed Kylo Ren’s wrist just as he was about to bring his own weapon down onto her before lifting him completely off of the ground and throwing him into the other Knights.

“Can’t say you’re faring any better with your back up dancers, greastain,” she said cheekily as the three Knights tried to scramble back to their feet.

Behind her, the elevator opened and she was met with a rush of happiness and joy. Turning back, she grinned as Rey ran onto the bridge and threw her lightsaber to her. She caught it and activated it, holding her blade at the ready as Rey moved to stand beside her.

“Perfect timing, hon,” Aliana smirked.

“I’m nothing if not punctual,” Rey said with a grin. She reached to grab at the lightsaber on the left side of her belt before finding it being pulled out of reach.

She turned around to see Snoke glaring at her, her single bladed weapon landing daintily on the arm of his throne. “Ah, Amorosa’s pet Jedi,” he drawled. “You have come to share the same agonizing end as your Master.”

“Well aren’t you a treat?” Rey asked, unamused before reaching for her double bladed weapon on the right side of her belt and activating it to reveal two pale orange blades.

Kuruk and Trugden advanced again, their lightsabers raised as they focused their attention on Rey, preferring to take out what they believed to be the weaker target. Rey twirled her lightsaber over her head and parried the oncoming strikes from both Knights as Aliana turned her attention to Kylo Ren.

Kylo took but a moment to steel himself, pointing his own lightsaber at Aliana before advancing swiftly. More swiftly than he ever had before. She parried his initial strike, yet suddenly he blade was already back with an uncharacteristically swift counter. His motions were tighter. More controlled. Even taking into account any possible training this still didn’t add up.

Her gaze drifted to Snoke in the brief window she had between counters, his twisted face sporting an arrogant smile. He was guiding Kylo’s actions through the Force. The Dark Jedi’s sudden

competence was not his own.

She felt that same power flowing into the other Knights as they managed to press an advantage on Rey. The two women were pressed back to back, neither one injured, but understanding of the precarious situation they were in.

“Any ideas?” Aliana whispered.

“One,” Rey whispered back as she kicked a Knight away, “Just stay on the defensive, and make sure Snoke doesn’t take his eyes off you.”

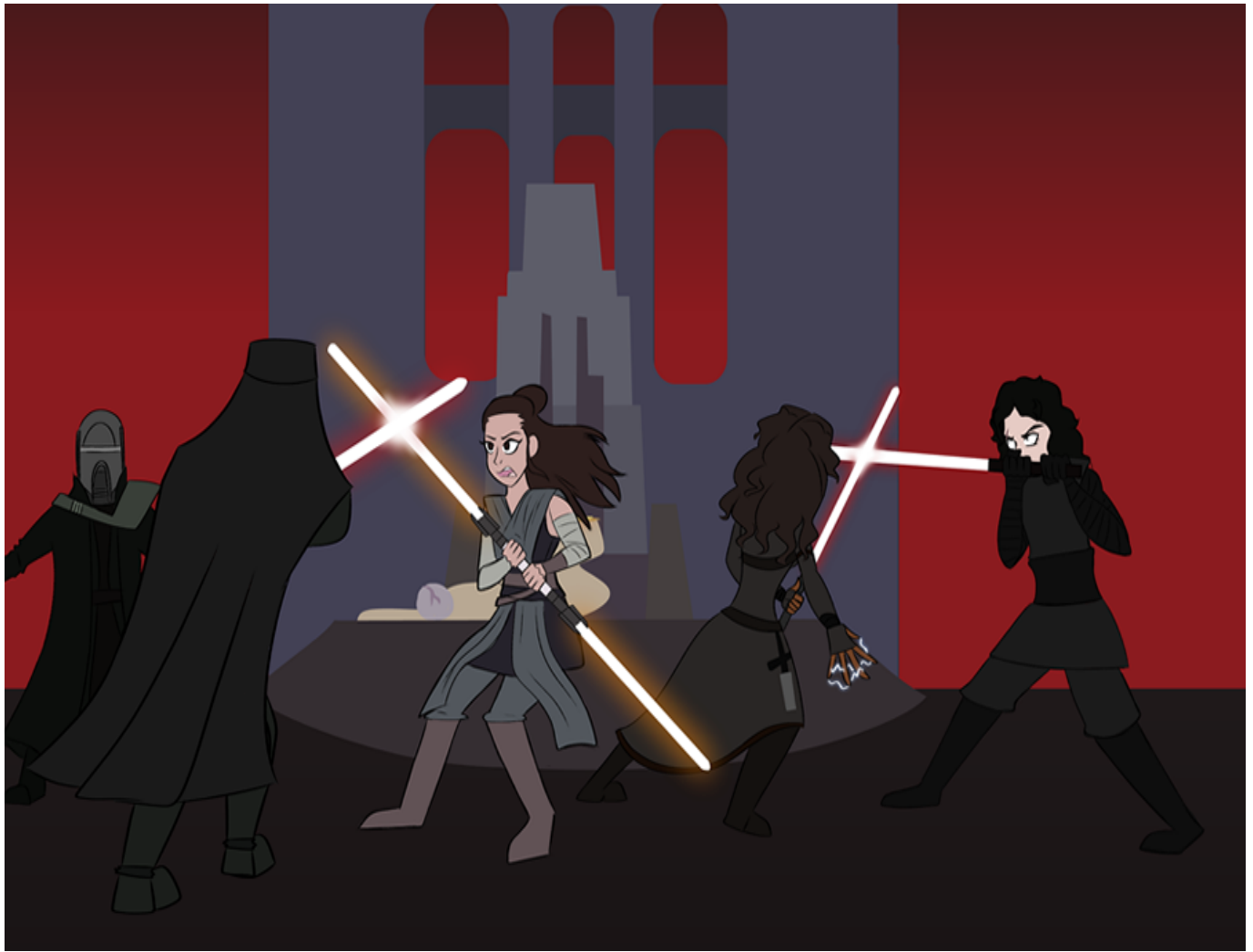
“I can do that no problem,” Aliana nodded as she parried a strike from Kylo Ren, only to spin and block another going to Rey’s exposed leg, “Watch yourself!”

“Got it!” Rey said before took a deep breath and focused on her plan. Rey managed to hold off the assault from the three knights alongside Aliana, but the Sith’s movements had more flourish to them, demanding the attention of those around her.

“Foolish girls,” Snoke said with venom and disdain. “You are both relics of a bygone era. A footprint in the sand. Doomed to be washed away by the tides. I see the future my Order will give the galaxy and you are not a part of it!”

Rey glanced at Snoke to see that his eyes were still burning a hole in Aliana’s skull and took that as her opportunity. Smacking Trugden’s lightsaber away, she spun around to parry another strike from Kuruk. Except as she did so, she took a hand off her lightsaber and flicked her finger at the lightsaber laying beside Snoke as she swept her hand behind her. Her Sith lightsaber activated and rotated as it shot across Snoke’s throne, bisecting the decrypt old man in one swift motion before flying to Rey’s outstretched hand.

The Knights halted, left in stunned silence at what had just happened. The Supreme leader was now laying in two pieces on the floor. The life fled from his body almost instantly. Snoke was dead.



Trugden and Kuruk attacked with newfound fury, their vicious assault striking hard against the impressive defense Rey had provided with her two weapons. She deactivated a single blade on her lightsaber to fight with dual blades instead and spun her weapons to connect with each strike that came her way.

Kylo Ren, meanwhile, had lost the benefit that Snoke had given him and Aliana was now driving him back to the other side of the throne room. However it seemed as if Snoke's control had given him some sort of epiphany as he was now fighting with more speed and less power. Aliana's advance wasn't as absolute as it had been in their previous encounters, but she was still advancing.

Rey, meanwhile, parried a strike from Trugden and locked sabers with him, turning under her wrist as she brought her back to him. She reactivated the second blade of her lightsaber and brought it into his unsuspecting gut with a sickening hiss.

The Knight let out a single hushed gasp, before dropping his lightsaber and falling limply to the floor. Kuruk looked on in horror as his fellow Knight laid dead. Fear took root in his mind as the odds shifted evermore in the women's favor. With a trembling hand, he reached out and pulled Trugden's lightsaber to him. Armed with both weapons he lunged at Rey, screaming at the top of his lungs.

"I'LL KILL YOU!"

Rey deflected his first strike, but his second came down with such force that her arm nearly buckled under the weight. In the brief second where she tried to brace herself, Kuruk's knee came up and struck her hard in the stomach. The wind knocked clean out of her, she dropped her lightsabers and fell to her hands and knees, trying to breathe as a pair of red lightsabers came screeching toward her neck.

In an instant, Aliana's entire world froze. As she shunted Kylo Ren's swing, she could feel the lightsaber about to come down onto Rey's neck at the same time she could see Kylo Ren moving for a lower strike. At that moment, she was forced to make a judgment call.

And in spite of the promise she'd made to Rey a few days ago, it was a judgment call that she didn't even need that moment to make.

She threw her lightsaber behind her and it soared across the bridge and collided with the blades about to kill Rey, knocking them off course and sending them into the durasteel floor with a deafening screech. This diversion gave Rey the time to recover and retrieve her own lightsaber and cut Kuruk across the torso.

At the same time, Aliana felt a burning pain in her leg as if it had been dipped in molten carbonite. Kylo Ren's lightsaber had cut through her leg just below the knee and severed it completely. As she struggled to stay on one foot with the agony searing through her, his lightsaber came up and rammed through her midsection. She the air rushed from her lungs. The white hot agony she felt was all encompassing, robbing her of any strength she still had. As she collapsed onto the floor, it took everything she had to not pass out, despite how desperately she wanted to.

Rey saw all of this as she recovered. She saw Aliana lay helpless on the floor, impaled and dismembered. Panic flooded her entire body as she lurched forward, the Force extending out from her hand and sending Kylo Ren flying into the far wall.

"ALIANA!" Rey screeched in terror before sliding down onto the floor beside her. She carefully lifted Aliana's upper body from the floor, her hands still trembling even under the Sith's weight. She saw the burning hole in Aliana's stomach as well as the smoldering cut where her leg once was.

"Alie! Say something! Please!" Rey begged, tears welling up in her eyes. Aliana was weak. She could feel it. Her body was just barely clinging to life.

Aliana let out a strangled gasp, reaching for Rey and clutching her robes, "It hurts!" she breathed, her legs curling up to her stomach.

Rey held Aliana close to her before rising to her feet, hoisting Aliana up with her. "Just hang on, darling!" she said. "We're gonna get you out of here! You're gonna be okay. I promise!"

As she spoke, Rey rushed over to the turbolift before a voice called out to her.

"Rey," Kylo Ren said as he limped to the center of the room.

"WHAT!?" Rey snarled, quickly whipping back around to glare at Kylo Ren. "WHAT DO YOU WANT!?"

"It's done. Whatever the Sith did to your mind is gone," Kylo Ren said, trying to hide his fear of the Jedi, "I can read you like an open book now."

“Good for you,” she snarled, tightening her grasp on Aliana’s waist, “Can you see how badly I want to kill you?”

“You want to kill me because of her,” He said, gesturing to Aliana. “You’ve only ever gotten involved with all this because of her. She made you dependent on her. You’re just another one of her puppets. But now you can break free. Kill her now. Give up everything she’s ever taught you. Let the Sith die. Let the past die.”

Rey almost couldn’t believe what she was hearing. Was he seriously trying to gaslight her after maiming the woman she... it was almost too ridiculous to believe.

Her outrage was interrupted by Aliana’s arm tightening around her neck and the strained voice of a dying woman, “Rey?”

The intense hatred she felt for the man who hurt her and Aliana so deeply was... not so much gone as it was put to the side, as panic returned to the forefront of Rey’s mind. “Alie?” she asked, worry etched onto her face.

Aliana was looking up at her, fear evident on her face, “Please don’t...”

Rey’s expression softened as she gently stroked Aliana’s face. “Alie, I would never do that to you,” she whispered. “I love you.”

“N-No! You’re still... You’re still holding on! Let go!” Kylo yelled, becoming increasingly frustrated.

Rey only reached her hand out and shot a torrent of lightning at Kylo Ren, sending him to the floor twitching in agony. She wanted to stay long enough to kill him, but she didn’t dare risk Aliana’s life any more than she already had done. She pulled Aliana’s lightsaber to her hand and secured her grip on the Sith before she turned and boarded the turbolift.

Kylo laid there on the floor, unable to lift himself up. All he could do was scream as the two women disappeared behind the closing doors.

Rey held Aliana close to her, whispering gently into her ear. “You’re going to be okay. We’re going to get you back on the Fury and taken care of. Just hang on. Please. For me.”

Aliana gave a weak nod and Rey tried to meet her gaze. When she did, however, what she saw only made her more alarmed and doubtful for her chance of survival. Aliana’s eyes were no longer the bright shade of crimson she had grown to love. They had faded to a dark brown color. The Force had grown so weak in her that she no longer bore the marks of the Dark Side.

The turbolift opened into the hangar, and Rey was met with the blasters of about a hundred Stormtroopers. She froze, unsure of what to do and not daring to let go of the Sith she was holding up.

“Jedi,” came a voice that broke through the sea of troopers. A woman covered head to toe in reflective chrome trooper armor stood at the front of the battalion. “You will lay that Sith down and surrender, or die violently by firing squad. Your choice.”

Looking around, Rey couldn’t see any alternatives. Nothing to throw, nothing to overload, the hangar had been stripped clean save for the Fury, which hadn’t even been secured. However, she

did see Finn, Poe and Rose on the other end of the hangar, trying to make their way quietly towards them. She needed to keep Phasma's attention, and stall for just a few more moments.

What better way to stall, than to play to ego?

"Please," she said quietly, "She's dying. I need to get her to the Fury."

"She's an enemy to the First Order, as are you." Phasma said plainly. "If she dies, she dies."

Aliana whimpered slightly. The pain she felt was too intense to focus on anything else than the Jedi she clung as desperately to as her own life.

"I don't want to do it," Rey said slowly, dragging out her words as much as possible, "But I will beg if you make me."

The room was silent for a moment. "...Very well," Phasma said, an air of smugness to her voice. "Then beg, Jedi."

Before she could, however, a small silver object was tossed into the crowd of Stormtroopers. One of them looked down to see a flashbang at his feet, and didn't even have time to yell when it exploded in a blinding screech. Phasma was distracted just long enough to see Finn throw a hand out and send her flying across the hangar, rushing forward to help Rey with Aliana while everyone was disoriented.

"What happened?!" he asked as he and Rey dragged the dying Sith to the Fury.

"Kylo!" She shouted, rushing to the ship as quickly as she could manage. "We need to get her on the Fury! Now!"

As the disorientation from the flashbang began to ebb, blaster fire began to rain onto the group. Finn's lightsaber spun in streaks of silver light as he managed to send the bolts back at the troopers that fired them. "Come on! Hurry!" he yelled back to the others, his focus on providing them cover.

Poe and Rose sprinted for the Fury's loading ramp with Rose helping Rey carry Aliana onto the ship. Poe covered them with his blaster as he and Finn backed into the ship until the ramp was closed completely. Poe clapped Finn on the shoulder in silent praise as he sprinted for the ship's controls to take them out of the hangar.

"2V!" Rey yelled as she pulled Aliana into the medbay, "Alie's been hurt!"

"Oh dear!" the droid said. "Please! Get her onto the table!"

Rey briskly, yet carefully laid Aliana down on the medbay table as 2V examined her wounds. "She is in a very bad state," he said, dread heavy in his synthetic voice. "We'll need to provide carefully placed bacta injections where her wounds are. Simply putting her in the tank in this condition could cause her vital organs to mesh together and become useless."

"You can save her though, right?" Rey asked, "You promise?"

"I estimate a 13.78976% chance of survival if proper measures are taken swiftly and precisely," 2V said as he pulled the bacta injectors and a few medical droids out of the cabinets, "Please step back while I operate."

“Is there any way I can-?” Rey began to ask, her hands beginning to tremble even worse.

“Miss Rey, I do not wish to offend,” 2V said, “But operations this delicate are best handled without the interference or organic error. I am the best equipped to tend to Alie’s injuries. Please step back so that I may do that.”

Rey was silent, but did as 2V said, stepping out of the medbay. The door closed behind her, and she was cut off from any further information. All she could do was sit on the sofa and wait.

Rose sat down beside her and wrapped an arm around her shoulders, “Hey, it’s going to be okay.”

“No it isn’t,” Rey shook her head, tears starting to fall, “She got hurt helping me...”

“She helped you because she loves you,” Rose said, rubbing Rey’s shoulders gently. “You would have done the same for her. I know you would.”

Finn walked over to the two, feeling Rey’s distress through the Force. “You and Aliana are the strongest fighters we got. If there’s anyone who can come back from something this bad, it’s definitely her. She’s a fighter Rey. She’s gonna be fine.”

Rey didn’t say anything in response and just hugged Finn tightly, burying her face in his neck as she started weeping. Finn held her as Rose rubbed her back comfortingly. He’d felt something happen in the Throne Room. He felt someone being hurt. He’d thought it was Rey at first, and was surprised to see her hauling Aliana out of the turbolift with a smoking hole in her stomach and one of her legs missing. It seemed that Rey had spared them both an even worse fate, yet here she was breaking down completely and blaming herself for wounds caused by the Knights.

“I’m sorry, Rey,” he said softly as he stroked her hair, “But I’m sure she’ll pull through.”

Rey couldn’t form a coherent thought. All she could do was cry. She knew something like this would happen. She knew Aliana would have been harmed by this plan, and she let her go through with it anyway. She tried to ignore her fear and listen to reason only for what she feared to actually happened. She felt foolish, weak and ashamed with herself. Her thoughts were muddled by these feelings. All she had it in her to do was weep and hold onto Finn.

‘Please be ok, Alie,’ she thought silently.

Chapter End Notes

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Grow Old With Me

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Two days at Hyperspace and Rey was practically losing her mind. Aliana's condition was still up in the air as 2V hadn't come out of the medbay since closing it. The light indicating that he was still performing surgery was still on, and the soundproofing meant she couldn't hear anything. She'd spent most of those two days pacing back and forth in front of the door and ignoring almost everything else.

The rest of the ship looked on in worry as Rey's fortitude continued to crumble. Rose and Finn kept trying to assure her that everything would be ok and that the fact that Aliana wasn't dead yet was a good sign. Poe attempted to ease Rey's worries by remarking how very capable 2V was at this sort of thing, speaking from personal experience, of course. Despite their best efforts however, Rey continued to pacing in front of the door, growing more anxious and panicked as time went on.

"Got word from the Resistance," Poe said, stepping out of the cockpit. "They made it to Crait safe and sound. They'll have the base set up by the time we get there."

"Sounds good," Rose nodded, "Are we staying there or are we just laying low?"

"Leia wanted to find a site for a permanent base, but Crait is a stopping point to refuel and call for allies," Poe explained, "It's a heavily armored Rebel base, the First Order will have a hard time penetrating it even if they do find us."

"Uh-huh," Rey said absently, her pacing not breaking stride as Poe spoke. He sighed and hung his head low seeing how completely out of it Rey appeared to be.

"I made sure to update them about our situation," Poe added, "told them to have medical officers at the ready when we land."

"Mmhmm," Rey said as she continued pacing.

Poe and Finn looked at each other and shook their heads, "Rey, c'mon. You've got to get away from that door. Worrying like this isn't good for you."

"I can't," Rey said, finally stopping. "I can't... I can't think about anything else. I can't take my thoughts away from whatever is happening behind that door. Every time I try, it doesn't work. I try to think about the Resistance or recite the Jedi teachings to myself, but my thoughts always come back to this kriffing door!"

As if on cue, the surgery light shut off and the door to the medbay opened, with 2V stepping out onto the flight deck, "Oh! Miss Rey! How convenient!"

Rey wasted no time and practically shook 2V by the shoulders. "How's Aliana? Did you save her? Is she ok? How's she feeling? Is she awake?" she asked in a single breath.

"Miss Alie's condition is critical, but stable, Miss Rey," 2V said as the door to the medbay closed behind him, "She has undergone extensive reconstructive surgery, and I shall fill you in once you

have sat down and had something to eat. Not a moment sooner.”

“We should have thought of that,” Poe muttered to Finn.

Rey frowned, trying to look past 2V into the medical bay to catch a glimpse of Aliana before it closed. She sighed, relenting to the droid’s conditions. “Alright,” she said meekly. “I’ll eat something.”

She begrudgingly sat down at the dining table as Finn brought out leftover soup Aliana had put in the conservator a few days prior. She smiled as the familiar dish was laid in front of her, and felt a little bit more at peace. Having Aliana’s cooking was a bigger comfort than she’d realized. As she took a sip, she looked up at 2V expectantly.

“I should warn you, much of this information is not for the squeamish,” he said.

Rey nodded. “I understand,” she said.

Finn sat beside Rey, silently glad that he didn’t get any soup for himself given what they were just about to discuss.

“Very well. First, Miss Alie’s leg was severed. I have fitted her for a temporary replacement, but she will need to have a skilled engineer fit her for a proper leg with all the cybernetic equipment necessary for full motor function. Second, much of Miss Alie’s internal organs in her lower abdomen have suffered extensive physical damage, and many others were burned by the heat. The injuries are consistent with the effects of a lightsaber. As we have limited bacta on board, I prioritized repairs to her vital organs such as her kidneys and intestinal tract,” 2V ran through a list with all the cold efficiency of... well, a protocol droid, “All non-vital and vestigial organs have had to be removed and disposed of.”

Rey’s frown deepened as the information was relayed to her. The cybernetic leg wasn’t a problem. Hell, Rey could, and certainly would, make Aliana a new leg. She lost her leg because of her. It was the least she could do. It was Aliana’s stab wound that worried her the most. Was the repair to her vital organs sufficient? How well would Aliana function without her ‘non vital’ organs? These questions buzzed in her mind and filled her with greater anxiety. Despite this, however, all she could manage to say was, “...Okay.”

“Furthermore, the lightsaber Miss Alie was impaled with also severed her spinal cord,” 2V continued, “She would have been paralyzed from the waist down had I not intervened. I have taken the liberty of replacing her damaged spine with a cybernetic replacement. This was the most extensive and time-consuming operation to perform, and I have only just finished.”

Finn’s eyes widened. “Wait so... you replaced her ENTIRE spine!? Like, the whole thing? How does that even work?”

“Finn,” Rose said, pointing out how clearly distressed Rey still was. “Maybe not the best time?”

“Oh yes, Mr Finn! I felt precautionary measures should be taken,” 2V said enthusiastically, “Her new spine is encased in a cortosis alloy. It should be impervious to lightsaber damage in the future, and impede many of the more gruesome lightsaber injuries Sith are known to suffer.”

“Well that’s certainly good,” Poe said, looking over at Rey. “We definitely don’t want this to happen again. You said she’s stable?”

“Indeed. I have put her into a medically induced coma to recover from surgery and let the procedures do their work unimpeded,” 2V nodded, “I expect her to make a full recovery within four months, and return to consciousness within two.”

Rey continued to take deep calming breaths, trying desperately to calm herself. “So... she’s going to be okay?” she asked.

“Her full recovery will take time and require that she not overexert herself, but yes. Alie will be okay.”

Rey rose from her seat and pulled the droid into a tight hug. “Thank you,” she whispered, a single tear sliding down her cheek.

“I require no thanks, Miss Rey. Medical duties are one of my many functions,” 2V replied, patting Rey’s back.

Rey pulled away, smiling at 2V. “I’m still grateful, if it’s all the same to you,” she said, wiping her eyes.

“Very well, Miss Rey,” 2V nodded, “Shall I tend to your injuries now?”

Rey raised an eyebrow, looking confused, “My injuries?”

“Indeed! Scans performed when you reboarded the ship have indicated you have two broken ribs,” 2V explained, “Have you not noticed, Miss Rey?”

Rey looked down to herself, giving a part of her torso a probing touch. She felt a jolt of pain shoot through her as she pressed against where her ribs must have been broken. She remembered the harsh blow that broke them in the throne room and she remembered that pain staying unnoticed in the back of her mind ever since Aliana was injured. “I... honestly didn’t,” Rey answered.

“Have you seriously been running on adrenaline for two days straight?” Poe asked incredulously.

“In my experience, Captain Dameron, Sith are able to ignore pain from life-threatening injuries with enough focus,” 2V explained, “Darth Mayrik once went two weeks without getting a broken foot examined.”

“But... Rey isn’t a Sith,” Rose said.

Rey’s hands balled up into white knuckled fists as anger smoldered off of her being. “After I get my hand on Ren,” she growled quietly. “I may very well be.”

“I am not programmed to identify the Force the way organics do, Miss Tico. Miss Rey has all the physical symptoms of the Dark Side that Darth Alora programmed into my database,” 2V explained, “I apologize if I have made an error in judgment.”

“It’s ok, 2V,” Rey said, the sincerity of 2V’s words allowing her anger to subside. “And, yes. I would like some help with my ribs now. Seeing as I can feel them again.”

“Very well, Miss Rey. Please follow me to the medical bay.”

Rey couldn't take her eyes off Aliana, even as 2V jabbed and prodded her with instruments. She was laid on her back with a rebreather attached to her face. Wires and connectors were fed underneath her, presumably into her back to aid in the integration of her new spine. If she thought she looked bad on the Supremacy, now that she could see the injuries up close and personal she was struck with a feeling of dread.

2V had said she would make a full recovery. However, that information did nothing to make the mess of stitches, synthflesh that was still adapting to Aliana's skin tone, and machinery feeding into her body any less disturbing. All of this for one lightsaber wound?

"There we are," 2V said, stepping away from Rey. "The bones should knit back into place within one to two days, provided you allow yourself the time to recover." As he spoke, he noticed that Rey's eyes remained fixed on Aliana. He turned his optics over to look at the Sith as well, the sight of her unconscious and hooked up to so many devices causing an influx in his memory banks. "You know, I spent hundreds of years tending to each and every generation of the Beniko family on that table."

"Were any of them in this bad of shape?" Rey asked, her voice quiet.

"Oh, far worse!" 2V explained, "Darth Caida had none of her original limbs left by the time she was thirty-five! I believe she also suffered a lightsaber wound to the abdomen as well."

Rey's eyes widened. "And... she survived?"

"Indeed. In fact, she and Lana Beniko had one of the longest and most prosperous lifetimes of any in their family."

Upon hearing that, Rey's hopeful optimism gave way to a memory from just a few days ago, when Aliana had told her that dying young was common in her family, "How... how long do Sith in the Beniko family live?"

"On average, 23.7 years Miss Rey," 2V recited.

The information was rather sobering for Rey. With a mortality rate like that, it seemed miraculous that her family even survived this long. "I see," she said softly.

"Not to worry, Miss Rey. Miss Alie has already exceeded the average life expectancy for women in her family," 2V assured her. There was a quiet pause as neither of them said anything, and 2V was searching his databanks for something reassuring, "Oh! You would like to know that Miss Alie asked about you before I put her under."

"She did?" Rey asked, her expression perking up considerably. "W-What did she say? She-she's not... upset with me over having to save me the way she did, is she?" As the words left her mouth, Rey knew how utterly ridiculous they sounded. She knew Aliana wouldn't hold any ill will towards Rey for her own actions, but the insistent and cruel voice in her head kept suggesting otherwise. She wanted to be sure.

"Not at all, Miss Rey," 2V shook his head, "She merely inquired as to whether or not you were functioning normally, and asked that I ensure you do not, as she put it, run yourself ragged."

Rey let out a small huff of laughter. Of course, even on the brink of death as she was, Aliana was still more concerned about her. She looked over at the comatose Sith, the feeling of dread still

twisting inside her, but feeling less extraneous. "...She really is something," she whispered.

"She is a most unusual Sith," 2V agreed, "And she has been taken with you since you came on board. I do believe your presence has made her happier than I have seen her in nearly a decade."

For the first time since they left for the Supremacy, Rey felt her heart flutter. To know that she truly made Aliana so happy was soothing and invigorating all at once. She smiled and looked back at 2V. "She's made me happier than I ever remember being," she said with a smile. "I'm so glad I got to meet the both of you. I feel like I'd be worse off if I hadn't."

"It has been a pleasure having you on board, Miss Rey," 2V agreed, "Per Miss Alie's instructions, the ship is yours while she remains comatose and I am to tend to the needs of you and your friends."

"Thank you," Rey said, placing a fond hand on 2V's shoulder. "When we touch down on Crait, please make sure the medical officers have everything they need to take care of her. Oh, and please make sure that General Organa isn't left alone with her." As displeased with herself as Rey was to suspect Leia of any sort of foul play when Aliana was so vulnerable, she was not in the state of mind to take any chances.

"Of course, Miss Rey."

The Fury touched down on Crait late that evening as the sun was almost completely below the horizon. The Raddus was the only ship to have survived with 60% of the Resistance personnel on board. The support ships had been destroyed before they had managed to get the tracker offline. The Raddus itself wasn't in the best condition. Without a refuelling ship, they were stranded. The only recourse was to wait for a response from the Republic. The Fury had a full fuel tank thanks to its solar collector, but it was too small to fit the 200 people that were now holed up in the mountainside base.

Rey had barely noticed anyone else as she walked beside the medical officers wheeling Aliana's bed down the ramp and into the base's medical bay. The Fury was too exposed, and would likely be needed in combat and Rey didn't want to take any chance of her getting caught in the blast. As the medical officers rushed ahead of her, they passed by Leia, who glanced at the bed briefly before doing a double-take and staring at it.

Looking up to Rey, she could only ask, "What happened?!"

Rey looked Leia dead in the eyes as she spoke. "We were fighting the Knights of Ren in Snoke's throne room. Aliana left herself open to attack to save me from a killing blow and was wounded by Kylo Ren. She's been in critical condition ever since." She kept her gaze fixed on the General. Her eyes silently dared her to say something antagonistic or paranoid.

Leia glanced back toward the medical bay, "I sure hope she killed Snoke first, at least. Otherwise she's going to be quite embarrassed when she wakes up."

"I killed Snoke," Rey replied, "And most of the Knights of Ren are gone. The Resistance escaped and the First Order is without a leader. I say that's a win." Even as Rey spoke these words into existence, deep down she knew she wouldn't believe them to be true until Aliana woke up.

Leia laid a hand on Rey's shoulder, looking up at her sympathetically, "Are you going to be okay? This must be tearing you up inside."

Rey blinked, not expecting that such compassion from Leia over something that involved Aliana. "...It's... It's not easy," Rey admitted with a weary sigh. "I feel like I could come undone at any moment. Like the only thing keeping me together is cheap adhesive and the hope that she'll wake up."

"I'm sure she will," Leia nodded, "The only thing I can be certain of about Amorosa is that she'd pull a Star Destroyer out of orbit for you."

Rey allowed herself a small smile at Leia's words. She genuinely didn't anticipate this being how this discussion would go. "Yeah, she probably would," Rey admitted before looking back to the medical bay. "...She'll be safe here, right?" she asked.

"I can't imagine any place safer right now," Leia suggested, "We're still getting the primary systems online, but the medical bay was sterilized and running within the first day. Too many wounded to leave it."

Rey felt a sigh of relief escape her throat. "Thank you," she said sincerely. "I... I'd like to stay with her. While I can."

Leia nodded, "Alright. Take all the time you need."

Rey hurried over to the medical bay. She stepped through the open door, watching as the specialists secured Aliana onto a bed, ensuring none of the tools intended to stabilize her were disrupted. They had connected her to their own monitoring equipment and refilled the compartment for her feeding tube. After a moment, Aliana was situated and the medical officers dispersed to their other duties. Rey rushed over to Aliana's bedside, sitting beside her. She wanted to hold her hand or stroke her cheek or really do anything to just feel that the woman she loved was still alive, yet she feared that the second she did touch her, she'd come undone like a house of cards.

Instead, she resorted to words. "I'm right here," Rey whispered softly. "I'm not going anywhere."

There was no response, as was expected. Only the steady beeping of the monitoring devices and the faint sound of Aliana's rebreather. Rey leaned forward and rested her elbows on the edge of the bed, getting as close to Aliana's face as she felt safe doing.

"Please be okay," she whispered, "Please don't leave me like this."

Aliana said nothing, still deep in her medical induced slumber. She offered no words of reassurance, no indication that she would suddenly awaken, but she remained. She remained alive and by Rey's side. For the time being, that would have to be enough. Then something occurred to her. Something she hadn't put too much thought into when she'd heard it back on the Fury. Kylo Ren had said that her shield had vanished when Aliana was wounded. She sat up and her heart started to race when the full weight finally settled onto her like a Duranium brick.

The shield had required Aliana's focus to maintain. With her wounded, it was gone. So long as Aliana remained comatose like this... she was exposed.

Rey began to tremble violently. Having Kylo Ren inside her head the way he had been was horrible. It was only Aliana who had provided her any form of solace from that monster and now

she couldn't. Her head whipped around the medbay, looking for any sign of Kylo Ren to confirm whether or not he was using the connection. She didn't see him nor did she feel his presence nearby, though that did little to ease her sudden anxieties. It instead left her worried when exactly he would return. When he would come to torment her with his sickening presence.

"Rey?" Called out Finn, catching Rey's attention. "You alright? You look like you're having a panic attack."

"I... I don't..." Rey started to hyperventilate as Finn grabbed her by the shoulders and tried to hold her steady, "I don't want him my head!"

"Wait, what? Who's in your head? Rey, what are you talking about?" Finn asked, looking both confused and increasingly worried.

Rey felt a dampening presence around her, and felt her heart slow and her breathing return to normal. It felt as if she was being physically restrained, but through the Force. She looked up to see Leia standing in the doorway, her hand outstretched and looking her dead in the eye. Rey took a few deep breaths to calm herself and leaned against Finn in a tight hug.

"Kylo Ren. I have a Force Bond with him," she explained, trying to keep from crying again, "On Ahch To he constantly showed up to manipulate me, until Alie blocked the connection. And now that she's hurt... it's gone. It's open again..."

Finn's expression became one of growing dread as Rey recounted her story to him. Kylo Ren was inside her mind? That had to be horrible. "Is there-Is there anything we can do?" he asked.

Rey shook her head, "The holocron she learned it from... was destroyed... and now she's the only one who knows how to do it."

Rey's complete breakdown at simply the idea of the connection with Kylo Ren being reopened was like a bucket of ice water being dumped over Leia's head. When she'd first heard about the Force Bond, she'd only imagined positive things. She'd assumed Amorosa had blocked the connection for her own reasons. Neither she nor Rey would share any details on the matter, leaving her only to speculate. Seeing how distraught she was, and hearing the real story for the first time, made her feel horrible for even considering the bond to be an opportunity.

Leia approached the two silently, not saying anything until she stood before them. "Rey?" she prompted, calling her attention. "I understand how distraught you are about this. I don't know the shielding technique that Aliana used on you. I won't pretend to be smart enough to figure it out. But if ever you feel..." she paused for a moment, as if considering her own words more carefully. "...Kylo Ren's presence, if you can, contact me immediately. Don't talk to him. Don't listen to anything he has to say. Just contact me. I can't shield your mind from him but I can keep him at bay until Aliana wakes up."

Rey looked up at Leia, surprised at such an offer from her. Just a few days ago, Leia was overjoyed about the bond and reacting with visceral horror when Rey confessed to loving Aliana. Now she was actively helping to protect her from her own son. "...Thank you, General."

Leia nodded and turned to leave, but stopped at the door, "And... I'm sorry for how I've treated the two of you."

Rey was left stunned for a moment before nodding at Leia before she turned the corner. Letting out a heavy sigh, her head fell upon Finn's shoulder. "I'm... I'm so tired," she said, fatigue thick in her voice.

"You need to sleep, Rey," Finn said quietly, stroking her hair, "You've been awake for two days. You need to get some rest."

Rey mumbled in what Finn could only assume was agreement before she lifted her head slightly to look at Aliana. "I'd like to rest here," she said, eyeing where she was just sitting beside Aliana. "If I can."

Finn glanced around and noticed another bed on Aliana's left, away from all the machines that were hooked up to her, "I think I can manage that," he said as he gently guided Rey to sit back down. He went around Aliana's bed to the empty one and pushed it closer to her, pressing the sides of the frame together until the magnetic seals engaged and they were locked together. He made sure it wouldn't slide and that none of the wires and tubes would be jostled by any movements either Rey or Aliana made, and then gestured for her to come over.

Rey rose back to her feet and walked around to the other side of the conjoined beds. If not for her utter fatigue she likely would have felt overjoyed by the prospect of resting beside Aliana again after two days without sleep. "Thank you, Finn," she said, pulling him into another hug. "Really. You... you've been amazing."

Finn held her tightly, nodding as Rey tucked her head under his chin, "You saved my life back on Ilum. It's the least I can do."

Rey smiled against his shoulder, giving Finn's body an affectionate squeeze before pulling away and looking at the bed. She began pressing her weight onto it, the soft surface making her weariness feel even stronger. Soon enough she was laying on her side across from Aliana, unable to take her eyes off her. The prospect of two months without hearing her voice or being able to wake up beside her properly seemed farther away than it had when 2V had given his estimated recovery time, and she slid as close to her as she could manage. In the back of her mind, she was almost in denial. Trying to convince herself that Aliana would wake up in a few days at the most.

She shouldn't have been getting her hopes up. Even if she did, she would likely be put right back to sleep until she was properly recovered.

"Don't just become another statistic in 2V's database," she quietly begged, "Live. Get well. ...Grow old with me."

Aliana said nothing. She didn't wake up or suggest that she heard Rey, but she nonetheless remained. And for now, that would have to be enough.

"You know they're going to find us eventually," Holdo said as she sat around the base's makeshift war room with Leia.

"I know," Leia nodded, "If all else fails... we'll put as many people as we can onto the Falcon and the Fury and just run."

"That involves the risk of having to leave others behind," Ackbar warned. "Our numbers are thin enough as it is. We can't afford to lose too many more."

“It’s not a choice I want to make,” Leia assured them, “But it’s one I may be forced to.”

Holdo frowned deeply. “Hopefully it will not come to that,” she said. “While inevitable, it will take the First Order some time to figure out where we are. It should be time enough for the Republic to hear and answer our distress call.”

“With Snoke dead, the First Order will be in disarray until they select a new ruler,” Leia nodded, “The Republic should be able to secure the front lines. I only hope they can manage that while there’s still a Resistance to save.”

“Have our contacts managed to find anyone else that’s sympathetic to our cause?” Holdo asked. “Senators? Military personal? Cargo services? Anyone?”

“None since the First Order began pursuing us from D’Qar,” Ackbar answered solemnly.

Leia’s eyes narrowed. The silence was frustrating, but understandable given the circumstances in Republic Space. They would need someone closer to the Outer Rim they could get a word out, but they had no specific contacts. Poe had a few from his smuggling days, but none that were...

Then she sat upright as it hit her. They’d had an Outer Rim mercenary in their ranks for months.

“Holdo, see if you can convince the droid on the Fury to surrender Aliana’s Outer Rim contacts,” she said, “There has to be someone out there who will answer.”

Holdo blinked seemingly surprised either that it was Leia that came up with this idea or that she hadn’t considered it herself. “I’ll get right on that,” Holdo said, dismissing herself from the war room and walking briskly in the direction of their makeshift hangar.

Leia sighed as she glanced up at the Raddus hovering in orbit. Even if they couldn’t refuel the ship, she just knew there was something out there that could help them. She had to keep believing that, as she was trapped on a barren planet in the middle of nowhere, with no fleet, her forces exhausted and demoralized, and her two best fighters in no condition to help. At this point, hope was about the only commodity they had left.

Kylo Ren was fuming in the Supremacy’s medical bay. Despite everything, despite being rid of a master who had abandoned him and taking the mantle of Supreme Leader, much to Hux’s dismay, he was still a failure. He’d killed the Sith, and had somehow managed to allow the Jedi to slip away. He was a Supreme Leader with no respect, who in just the two days since taking the throne had already brushed up against both Hux and Pasma who refused to fall in line.

In an instance where Kylo had reached out with the Force to grab Hux by the throat, Pasma’s sharpened baton was pressed firmly against his own throat before he could even react. In that moment, with ice cold durasteel lodged itself in his flesh hard enough to draw blood, did he realize that neither officer respected his authority, knowing he only had it on a technicality and not by merit. In an ideal galaxy, he could have crushed the life from her body as well as that of the General’s without a second thought. But this was not an ideal galaxy. This was the galaxy where he had power and command but no actual authority. A galaxy where everyone, absolutely everyone, was willing to question, second guess and ridicule his decisions. Everyone, including himself. And when a Force sensitive doubted themselves, their power was next to useless.

And so, he sat in the medical bay as a droid tended to the cut on his neck. ‘Even when I win, I lose,’ he thought to himself.

The door to the medical bay opened, and Hux stepped inside looking quite displeased to be there. “Supreme Leader,” he said with a sneer, “The technicians have repaired the sabotage to the hyperspace tracking beacon. But without a lead on where the Resistance has fled to, it is virtually useless to us at the present time.”

“Then find a lead,” Kylo Ren said, not making eye contact with Hux as the droid finished patching the gash in his neck. “I don’t understand why you insist on bothering me with problems instead of results.”

“Didn’t you say something about a connection being reopened through the Force on the bridge two days ago, before the Jedi fled with the Sith’s corpse?” Hux asked sarcastically.

Kylo’s gloved hand tightened into a fist as Hux spoke. It was true, the connection between himself and the scavenger had returned when Amorosa fell. Even so, he didn’t act on this new development to reach out and find her.

“...I had only begun to understand the nature of the connection before it was severed,” Kylo explained. “I will need time to understand it’s properties before I can rely on it to our advantage.”

It was a lie of course, he knew very well how the connection worked at this point. There was another, far more humiliating reason he did not seek to contact Rey through the Force. Fear. In every physical confrontation they had, Rey had defeated him. Even in the Supremacy’s throne room when the connection was reestablished, she put him to the ground like it was nothing before escaping. After everything from his constant defeats to the belittlement he received from all of his underlings. He was off balance. He was in conflict with himself. He could not press an advantage through the connection like that. He needed time.

Hux seemingly bought his excuse, if only because it reinforced his belief that Kylo Ren was a pathetic weakling, and left without another word.

Kylo Ren lowered his head and stared at the floor. Even with the Sith dead, it seemed she wasn’t through interfering with his plans. She’d trained Rey in the Dark Side, and Rey had become so powerful she could kill two Knights and Snoke within the span of sixty seconds. Even if they did track down the Resistance, would it only end in their own destruction?

It was in that moment that Kylo Ren so desperately wished he had heeded Amorosa’s first warning back on Jakku.

Rose looked down at her datapad, noting how the last of the supplies had been accounted for. With the Resistance’s numbers as slim as they were, everyone had their fair share of duties to see to. Hence, why Rose was doing inventory.

It wasn’t as though Rose was placed right back where she was however. Her contribution to the Supremacy mission was commended by High Command, giving her the title of lead technical advisor to the General. Paige expressed how proud she was of her little sister for her accomplishments. It felt good to receive such high praise from someone she cared about, as well as knowing that Paige managed to escape with everyone aboard the Raddus. The sisters knew what

they were signing up for when they joined the Resistance. Still, she didn't want to think about what would happen if they lost each other.

"Hey," Came Finn's voice as he walked towards Rose. "They got you doing inventory?"

"Yeah, just finished up actually," Rose said with a smile, placing her datapad in her pack. "What have they got you doing?"

"Prepping weapons, calibrating the defenses, making sure we're hunkered down and ready for a fight," Finn explained, "Ya know, frontline stuff. Nothing major."

"Better than doing janitorial duties for the First Order I bet," Rose said with a fond chuckle. "So... You get a chance to see how everyone is doing? Morale wise, I mean?"

"Well... morale is certainly going to take a hit when they learn Alie's down for the count," Finn winced, "And that Rey is so emotionally devastated by it that she may as well be out too. But I think I'll avoid telling them that for as long as possible. Would rather be off this salt trap when that happens."

"Poor Rey," Rose said, her low and her expression crestfallen. "I mean, poor Aliana, of course. But I can barely imagine what Rey's going through right now. I hope she'll be ok."

"She fell asleep at least," Finn nodded, sitting down on a crate and sighing, "She's beating herself up with guilt though. The fact that Alie got hurt saving her is really gnawing at her."

"I bet," Rose said, sitting beside Finn. "Does... does the Force make you feel different? I mean, emotionally? Like would you say that you feel things more strongly than most?" she asked curiously.

"I... don't know. I only just started really learning about it," Finn shrugged, "Apparently Rey had her eyes opened to a world of new feelings on Ahch To-"

Rose couldn't help but snicker, "Alie's that good, huh?"

Finn sputtered and started laughing. The really loud, wheezy, ugly kind of laugh as he slid off the crate and onto the... Crait. "I'm not the only one! I was laughing for hours when she said that, I wouldn't let her live it down!"

Rose nearly doubled over in laughter at that. She had to brace herself to keep from falling down alongside Finn. "I know I certainly wouldn't mind seeing this new world of feelings," she said with a cackle. By the Force, did it feel good to laugh.

"Did she fall to the Dark Side, or fall *for* the Dark Side?" Finn laughed.

"I'll give you a hundred credits if you ask Rey that!" Rose said with a chuckle.

"I'm gonna need more than a hundred if you want me to antagonize her," Finn scoffed, "I'm not gonna get on a Sith's bad side."

"Alie's?" Rose said, tilting her head in curiosity. "I mean if you can manage to get on someone's bad side when they're unconscious, that would certainly be impressive."

“No, Rey’s,” Finn corrected her, “I mean... she’s a Sith, isn’t she? She’s been learning from Alie, she had a red lightsaber for a while, the lightning...”

“I mean, you would know better than me. I’m a technical advisor, not a Force historian,” Rose said with a shrug. “If Rey says she’s a Jedi, then I believe her.”

“She said on the Fury she might just be,” Finn shrugged, “That’s the latest I’ve heard.”

“Well I’m going to wait until I hear her confirm it before I speculate at all,” Rose said rising from the crate. “Either way, one of us may want to check on her. I haven’t seen her at the mess hall any, and I worry she might not be eating.”

“She went to sleep about a few hours ago,” Finn explained, “Remember, she was awake the entire time Alie was in surgery. I slid a bed up beside her and let Rey sleep there.”

“Oh, yeah that’s right,” Rose said with a wince. “Let’s hope that rest does her good. She was a kriffing wreck on the Fury.”

“It’ll do some good, but I don’t think she’s going to see major improvement until Alie wakes up,” Finn shook his head and looked down at the floor, “She’s too attached to her for anything else.”

“And 2V said that could take at least two months,” she said, sighing dourly. “With any luck, the First Order won’t find us before then. If they do, things can get very bad.”

“That’s why we’re digging in, isn’t it? We’re expecting them to find us,” Finn said.

“Yeah, but we only just recently found out they can track us through lightspeed, so who knows what other tech they might secretly have at their disposal,” Rose clarified. “Even if we expect them to find us, the longer we have to prepare the better off we’ll be.”

Finn nodded and pulled his lightsaber off his belt, inspecting it. He hadn’t really seen any major training and had been going off his own intuition and experimenting with his abilities. And with Aliana out and Rey still as compromised as she was, it was unlikely he would before leaving Crait. If he survived that is. The thought of an actual ground battle with the First Order, rather than a stealth mission like the Supremacy, was so terrifying to him that he almost didn’t want to believe it was coming.

But he knew it was. He could almost feel it.

“...What about you Finn?” Rose asked, breaking the moment of silence. “I mean, where do you think you fall in the Force? Jedi? Sith? Somewhere in between maybe? Is that a thing?”

Finn looked up, a confused frown on his face, “I... I don’t actually know. Jedi kinda felt like a no-brainer, but... I mean we have one, maybe two Sith on our side right now. I guess I can’t really make that decision yet.”

“That’s fair,” Rose said before putting a hand on Finn’s arm. “I just hope you know that we have your back no matter what you choose. I know the General has her bias’ about Sith and their teachings. But honestly, most of us just want to live to see the First Order destroyed. If the Sith are the key to that, you’ll hear no complaint from the Resistance.”

Finn smiled, “Thanks Rose.”

Rey's eyes slowly opened, a feeling of intense discomfort stabbing at her back. The beds in the medbay were not nearly as comfortable as the Fury. Coupled that with a very turbulent sleep and you had the recipe for one cranky Force User.

Rey moved to sit up, but found herself impeded by something holding her down. She blinked and rubbed at her eyes, trying to dispel the blurriness in her vision, and saw a dark brown arm draped around her waist. Looking back, she saw that Aliana had shifted and was clinging to her.

Rey's gaze was fixed on the unconscious Sith holding onto her. A gaze that began to grow blurry again as tears began to well up in her eyes. Her discomfort was soon forgotten in place of the wellspring of emotions that flooded into her chest. Rey settled down on the bed once more, looking at Aliana as she nestled into her. She still wished that Alie was awake, but this moment was a great comfort.

'Rest and recover, Alie. I'll keep you safe,' Rey thought to herself, carefully raising a hand to gently stroke the other woman's cheek. *'No one will ever hurt you this badly again. I promise.'*

Aliana said nothing, as was expected. But the monitor displaying her heart rate picked up speed ever so slightly. Rey had heard that people in a coma could hear what was around them, and wondered how much she could understand in this state.

"I love you," Rey said out loud, her eyes glancing at the monitor to see Aliana's heart rate briefly pick up once more. She smiled, turning her gaze over to Aliana. She was going to be okay. Rey would make sure of it.

A few more minutes of enjoying Aliana's embrace, and then she reluctantly extracted herself from the Sith's arms and stood up. She was right, her back was a casualty. It throbbed and ached as she stretched and slowly limped her way out of the medbay. Her first thought was to find her friends, wherever they were. Probably the mess hall... if there was one. She briefly thought about eating herself, but she just didn't have the will for it right now. She'd eaten at 2V's insistence that he'd withhold information about Aliana from her unless she did, and if it hadn't been Aliana's cooking she probably wouldn't have been able to stomach it.

"How are you holding up?" Leia asked as she came up behind her, gently laying a hand on her shoulder.

Rey, nearly startled, turned to look at Leia. "I... I'm not sure," Rey said plainly. "I mean... I know Aliana will be okay. Everyone has made that quite clear to me. I know she needs time to heal. I just..." she trailed off, her arms wrapped around each other as she suddenly felt a cold chill run up her spine. "I miss her so much. I was so scared I'd lose her on that ship and even now... she feels so far away."

Leia felt a pang of sympathy for her. In truth, despite agreeing to get along with Aliana and feeling sympathetic toward what she'd been through in her life, she still didn't actually like the Sith at all. And she still believed Rey was making a mistake getting romantically involved with her. But seeing how much Rey seemed to care for her tugged at her heartstrings nonetheless. "I'm sure she'll be with you before you know it."

Rey gave Leia a look of subdued surprise. A part of her was almost certain that Leia would say something like 'Such attachments are unhealthy' or 'You're better off without her poisoning your mind.' To hear Leia say something comforting regarding Aliana of her own volition was...

refreshing to say the least. "...Thank you, General," Rey said with a gentle smile. "I simply hope that I can keep something like this from happening again."

"How do you plan to do that?" Leia asked curiously.

"Becoming stronger," Rey answered with conviction. "Make sure she never has to risk herself for my sake again. Keep her out of harm's way however I can." Her gaze turned back to the medbay. Her firm and absolute expression prompted a look of uncertainty from Leia, which had gone unnoticed by Rey.

"You can't keep her out of harm's way forever, Rey," Leia warned, "She's a Sith. She'll be on the front lines again at some point."

"She was hurt because I slipped up," Rey said. "It won't happen again. I will be stronger."

"Rey, please stop and think about what you're saying," Leia said, pulling on Rey's shoulder to bring her to a stop, "This sounds dangerously like the words that led Vader down the path of the Dark Side."

A reflexive retort died in Rey's throat as she processed Leia's words. From what she remembered reading about Darth Vader, that statement was technically accurate. Her stomach twisted slightly as she pondered the notion some more. "Well... what would you say I should do then?" Rey asked. "Because I absolutely cannot let something like this happen to Alie again."

"I understand that," Leia nodded, "But being desperate for power only makes it easier for someone to come along and offer it for a price. That's what happened to my father. Sidious tempted him with the power he needed, and played on his fears until Vader was eating out of the palm of his hand."

"I see..." Rey wanted to assure Leia that such a thing wouldn't happen to her. That there was no one left alive that could offer her such a thing as Sidious offered Vader. Yet she worried trying to argue such a thing would open into a larger debate that Rey just didn't have the energy or patience for. "I will... reflect on what you've said General. You have my word," she finished.

"That's all I ask," Leia smiled, letting go of Rey's shoulder, "I know I haven't done a good job showing it, but I am here for you."

"Thank you, Leia," Rey said. "That means a lot to me. I'll try to be here for the Resistance in the meantime. Just promise me that Aliana will be safe and tended to when I can't be here."

"You have my word," Leia nodded, "I'll have a medical officer check on her regularly, and post guards outside the medbay when they can be spared."

"I appreciate that," Rey sighed before her attention was turned to her grumbling stomach. "Oh... I don't suppose this base has a mess hall or anything?"

"East wing, down that way," Leia pointed to a hallway just on Rey's right, "About half our remaining forces are in there right now."

"Thank you," Rey said before turning her gaze back towards the medbay. "I'll be back soon," she added quietly before briskly walking towards the hallway that Leia directed her down.

It wasn't too much trouble finding the mess hall, though she did walk past it about four times due to her distracted thoughts. She was pleased to find the mess hall was, in fact, very quiet. She knew that it was because everyone was terrified, but with her head aching from the last few days of stress she was grateful for any reprieve from more noise.

Quickly catching sight of her friends, she sat down beside Finn and waved hello.

"Hey Rey!" Finn greeted cheerfully. "How you feeling?"

"Famished," Rey said plainly. "I don't suppose this place is serving cushnip at all? Maybe some soup?"

"Just standard ration packs sadly," Finn said with a shrug. "Full portions though, so that's good."

"I guess I've been spoiled," Rey laughed. The laugh was empty. Forced. It was only just dawning on her how completely detached she was and that she was still trying to hide it from the people she cared about. She mentally kicked herself for it and relaxed in her seat.

"Well, never too late to learn to lower your expectations," Poe said, coming by the table with a spare tray that he slid over to Rey before sitting down. "Here you are. Made sure to get you the freshest rations we got," he quipped.

"Oh boy, slightly newer dehydrated meat and bread," Rey said sarcastically, "My favorite."

The table had a round of subdued laughter before everyone turned their attention to their respective meals. There was a silence over the group that became increasingly awkward the longer it lasted. "So... how's Alie doing?" Finn asked, almost immediately wishing he hadn't said anything.

"She moved in her sleep," Rey said, the tiniest smile forming on her lips, "She hugged me."

Finn, Poe and Rose looked at each other, sharing a look of surprise. "Well that's good!" Rose said with a smile. "It means that she's well enough to know that you're close by. She should be awake and up on her feet in no time at this rate."

"I hope so," Rey smiled, "I hope it's a sign of good things, and not just something random. She looks so... she's hooked up to so many machines and life support systems right now that it feels like I've already lost her."

"Hey, don't say that," Finn said, reaching out to grasp Rey's hand. "2V said she'll recover from this. Aliana is made of tough stuff. There's no way she'd allow Kylo Ren of all people to kill her. She'll survive this out of sheer stubbornness if nothing else."

"I hope you're right," Rey said, taking a bite out of her polystarch. It was bland, but it was food. At least she was told it was food. "Any word on our defenses?"

"The entrance is made out of durasteel 9 meters thick," Poe replied. "There's going to need something extremely powerful to break through it. Outside that we got trenches in place with long ranged riflemen at all times. The General wants to see if we can make some sturdy turrets to help fortify things in the meantime. No telling how long that will take though."

"That sounds good," Rey nodded, "Any air support? Do we have any ships left that can come into orbit? Fighters?"

“Besides the Fury and the Falcon, about half a dozen X wings, I’d say.” Poe said “We had to make room aboard the Raddus for transports from the rest of the fleet. Most of our offensive ships had to be moved out, meaning they were free game to the First Order.”

“That’s not so good,” Rey frowned. She’d learned the hard way that she didn’t like going into battle without all her bases covered. Not after Takodana. “Is there any way we can scrape together more air cover?”

Rose rested her chin in one hand as she contemplated. “I think we have enough scrap that we can make some more fighters out of. We don’t have much in the ways of manufacturing to help us construct them... but with someone who could lift tons of metal with their mind, we’d certainly be able to get a few made at least.”

“Count me in,” Rey nodded, “I don’t want to risk the First Order getting inside the base at all if I can help it.”

“Alright. I’ll be sure to tell High Command that we can expect some more air support within the next few days,” Rose said, grinning ear to ear. “Better than having to order more fighters from defense contractors.”

Rey smiled at her, “Thanks Rose. I want to just keep busy as much as I can.”

“I understand,” Rose said. “Besides, I enjoy working with you. It’s nice to work with someone as tech capable as you.”

“Likewise. I had to repair damage to the Fury myself because *someone* doesn’t even know how the thrusters function,” Rey snickered, “*THE THRUSTERS!*”

Rose nearly choked on her polystarch as she laughed. “Oh my stars. I feel so bad for 2V!” she cackled.

“Feel bad for me, the woman’s helpless!” Rey laughed. Aliana’s tech illiteracy was always a source of humor for her. She was glad that Aliana joked about it too otherwise she’d feel guilty. “Did you know her shield generator was broken for two years and she never noticed?!”

Finn and Poe were soon compelled into laughter by the sheer ridiculousness of the situation. “Oh come on! Even I know how the shield generator works!” Finn said, all but hollering.

“It gets even worse! When she finally noticed she couldn’t even fix the damn things, and the shield generator has almost the same hookup and circuit pathway as a lightsaber, WHICH SHE CAN BUILD, REPAIR AND TROUBLESHOOT IN SECONDS!” Rey practically yelled as she laughed.

Poe nearly fell off the bench as he howled with laughter, all the while Finn actually fell off the bench. Rose rested her head on the table as she laughed into her hands. Their fit of laughing earned them more than a few confused looks from the rest of the mess hall that they either didn’t notice or care about.

“Oh goddammit, no wonder she had so much trouble flying the ship to Canto Bight,” Poe said, wiping a joy induced tear from his eye.

“I saw her wobble the shuttle out of the hangar, I was about to fall over dying,” Rey laughed, laying her head down on the table, “And then when she landed like it was a brick coming back, I don’t

even know how she does these things!”

“Oh my g- I’m gonna pee!” Rose choked out through her fit of laughter.

The table eventually managed to calm down from their humor induced high. Loud cackling turning into light chuckles and sighs of relief. “Oh dammit. I cannot remember the last time I laughed like that,” Poe said, trying to catch his breath.

“Me neither,” Finn said, clutching his chest, “Oh god, my chest hurts from this...”

“This is so mean, but it’s so funny!” Rose nodded in agreement as she tried in vain to stop giggling.

As Rey came down from her own high, she found the feeling of elation and joy quickly died only to be hit with the cold reminder of just where the subject of all this laughter was. As her giggling subsided they were quickly replaced by weeping as her eyes welled up with tears. The rest of the table sobered completely at the sight of Rey suddenly sobbing.

“Rey! Are you ok?” Finn asked, placing a hand on her shoulder. “What’s wrong?”

Rey didn’t answer. She covered her mouth with her hand and shut her eyes tightly as she completely broke down in front of her friends. In the span of a few seconds, she went from weeping to openly crying save for her hand muffling her voice. Finn put another arm around Rey’s shoulder, giving her something of a side hug as Rose rushed over to her other side, trying to comfort her. Poe turned in his seat to glare at any Resistance members who were observing the scene, silently demanding her privacy.

“It’s okay,” Rose whispered to Rey as she ran a hand up and down her arm. “It’s okay.”

Rey almost couldn’t hear them. She didn’t even feel like she was there. In her mind, she was back on the Supremacy, screaming in fear over a fallen Sith Lord who had risked everything to save her without a moment’s hesitation, despite promising her that she would never do that.

Who had so readily and easily thrown away the most precious thing to her without so much as a second thought.

Chapter End Notes

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They're Good Kids

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Kylo Ren sat on the throne on the Supremacy looking at the galaxy map projected in front of him. He'd been searching for the Resistance for the last nine days and nothing had come up. It seemed as though they had vanished into thin air. He could not allow this. He had to find them. He couldn't let a dead Sith have gotten the better of him.

But he was running out of options. Every search of habitable worlds had brought up nothing. All that was left to do was search every single barren, atmospheric world within fuel range. Problem was, there were thousands. Even if they did find where the Resistance was hiding, it was unlikely they would be there by the time they arrived. He needed a lead now.

And then, as if the Force was guiding him to it, he heard it.

That voice.

The Jedi's voice.

He looked up from the galaxy map to see Rey in the throne room. Her back was turned to him and she appeared to be deep in conversation with someone outside their bond. She didn't even seem to realize that he was there. Kylo remained silent, not wanting to catch her attention. He didn't need to say or do anything. He just needed to stay hidden and listen. Rey's guard was down. She would let information slip. He just needed the name of where they were.

One word.

"...Thank's Rose," Rey said gratefully to the other person, "I appreciate it. Now come on. We got ships to fix and I don't want to be on Crait any longer than we have to be."

Got it.

He opened his comm channel and signalled the bridge, "General Hux?"

Hux's image was projected before him, clearly not pleased about receiving a call from him, "What is it, Supreme Leader?" he asked.

"The Resistance is hiding on Crait. Set a course for the planet immediately," he ordered.

Hux looked openly surprised that Kylo had achieved any sort of results, "Is this information credible, Supreme Leader?"

"I heard it from the Jedi's lips herself," Kylo assured him.

"Very well," Hux said, "Setting course for Crait, sir."

With that the communication was cut. Kylo could feel the ship jump into hyperspace. He sat back on the throne, his brow furrowing in thought. The Jedi - the scavenger- had slipped up. She led the First Order right to her and her measly Resistance allies. What's more was that he couldn't just see

or hear her in that moment. He could feel her sorrow. Anguish and grief rolled off of her with no anger or rage to supplement it. She was overflowing with feelings of despair that she could draw no power from.

She was off balance, she was weak. There was no better time for them to attack.

His gaze was fixed on the holomap, now zoomed in on the planet Crait. This would be the Resistance's end. He would be sure of it.

Rey woke up to an alert on her personal comm channel. She sleepily reached for it off her nightstand and fumbled with it until it was active, "Mmm... hello?" she asked, "Who is it? What do you want?"

"Commander Rey, you and 2V-R8 are needed in the medbay immediately," came the anxious voice of a guard.

Rey leapt out of bed in an instant. Her feet ran across the sand encrusted ground of the base with little care of how uncomfortable it felt. Her body was too flushed with sudden panic to worry about such things. Something was wrong with Aliana, she could feel it. She reflexively weaved past Resistance members and other obstacles in her path on the way to the medbay. She couldn't let anything slow her down.

In less than a minute, she was at the medbay entrance. "What's wrong?" she said, her eyes darting back and forth, unsure of what to focus on.

"That's the thing, Commander. We don't actually know," the guard said, leading her inside, "The medics don't know either."

Upon being brought to Aliana's bed, Rey's eyes widened at what she saw. Patches of Aliana's skin were greying and her veins were visible. They were colored a sickly shade of purple, and whatever it was looked to be spreading slowly throughout her body. Only a few seconds later, 2V entered the medbay and saw the sight for himself.

"A most unusual symptom," he said, his objective and droid-like demeanor doing little to ease Rey's fears.

"2V, what's wrong with her!?" Rey asked anxiously as she rushed to Aliana's side. "Have you seen anything like this before?"

"I'm afraid I do not have these symptoms stored in my personal memory banks, Miss Rey," 2V explained, "Give me a moment to access the Fury's archives."

2V started to stare at the wall as his eyes began blinking a series of different colors. Rey was clutching his shoulder, anxious as she watched him continue to seemingly download information from the ship. Within seconds, 2V started moving again.

"Ah! I believe we are witnessing a Dark Side Burst!" 2V said, sounding happy to have the answer, "The Dark Side equivalent to what the Jedi call 'becoming One with the Force.'"

"What!?" Rey asked, disbelief and terror clear on her face. "She's dying!? You said she'd be able to wake up in two months! Why is this happening!?" Her gaze turned to the medbay staff, her

expression approaching one of them in anger. “What did you people do to her!?”

“N-Nothing, Master Jedi!” The staff said, backing away in fright. “We followed the droids instructions to the letter!”

“That’s a kriffing lie!” Rey snarled, “She was fine until... did General Leia order this?!”

“Excuse me, Miss Rey, but I have been monitoring Miss Alie’s life signs and there has been no change,” 2V explained, stepping between Rey and the guards. “Records left by Darth Caida suggest that the Dark Side Burst is an act of aggression by the Force against those who defy it’s will or attempt to enslave it to their own. I believe the Force is to blame for Miss Alie’s present condition.”

Rey’s expression went from boiling anger to one of greater confusion. “T-the Force is doing this?” Rey asked. “Why!? What has Aliana done to defy it’s will!? She-”

Rey’s eyes widened as a memory came rushing to the forefront of her mind.

“Rey, Force Bonds don’t work that way. The Force creates them of its own volition. The two people with a Force Bond don’t get a say in the matter.”

It was the Force Bond. She and Kylo Ren were bound by this higher power and Aliana obstructed it. She defied the Force’s will shielding Rey’s mind from that despicable creature, and now she was suffering for it.

Rey fell to her knees beside Aliana’s bed. She looked at the sickly Sith Lord as her chest panged and twisted with feelings of rage, sorrow and guilt all clashing against each other violently.

It was then that 2V spoke again.

“I do believe an old Sith technique would help you, Miss Rey,” he continued. “There is a power to transfer one’s own energy to another person. Sith would use this to heal others in dire moments or to preserve their own spirit. The technique has many uses and if carefully applied should stave off the Force’s grasp long enough for Miss Alie to recover on her own.”

Rey turned to look at 2V, her eyes wide with surprise as tears of sorrow became tears of relief. There was a chance. There was something Rey could do to save her. She quickly rose to her feet to face 2V. “This technique is in the Fury’s database, right?” Rey asked, praying the droid didn’t give her hope just to take it away.

“Of course, Miss Alie. Transmitting the learning instructions to the medbay database now,” 2V said, his eyes blinking in different colors again. This time there was only a half a second before he responded again, “Transfer complete.”

Rey rushed over to the holoterminal in the medbay, frantically searching for the data 2V just transferred. Her eyes fell on a file that was labeled in the ancient language of the Sith. She opened the file and the holoterminal lit up. A woman clad entirely in black robes appeared before her.

“By the Will of the Force, as the Jedi put it, life only flows in one direction. Life and death that brings new life, and so on. With this technique, we can allow life to flow differently. Among other possibilities, this technique can be used to heal yourself by draining the life from your enemies or allowing you to give your strength to a wounded ally, the latter should be implemented with caution. Either way, attempting to focus and transfer life energy will be met with resistance from

the Force. You must practice indomitable will for this technique to succeed. You must be absolutely certain that you are just in this transfer of power and defy the Force's protest. You cannot afford to compromise."

Rey nodded as she listened to the precise instructions on how to perform the technique, taking glances at Aliana and how the grey patches were spreading. She would have to defy the Force's will to save her. The thought filled her with determination. The Force wanted to pull her toward Kylo Ren, presumably to bring him back to the Light. It wanted to take Aliana from her to make it happen. She wouldn't allow it.

She saw the destiny the Force had laid out for her, and she loathed it. She had her own destiny. She made her choice. She would not allow anyone to take that from her.

Not even the Force.

She walked over to Aliana's bed, steeling herself for the task to come. She leaned over the comatose Sith Lord, gently placing a hand on her midsection. She closed her eyes and she began concentrating. She saw her own life energy through the Force, her mind focused around a portion of it, syphoning it off from the rest, she felt a wave of exhaustion wash over her from the act alone. She was manipulating her own Force power. Of course isolating a part of it would feel daunting. Nevertheless, she persisted. She channeled her will, allowing her energy to flow through her body and into Aliana's.

Almost immediately she felt the Force resisting her. It was like a bulwark pushing against her attempts to heal Aliana. Her brow furrowed as she pushed through, the barrier giving way to her defiance. The wall between her and Aliana remained thick however. It felt as though she was trying to puncture the hull of a Dreadnought bare handed. And yet, Rey held strong, her teeth clenched as she pushed harder and harder against the very power that was attempting to take her Sith away from her.

'You will not take her!' she said inwardly to the bulwark who pushed against her own will. *'I will not take the path you have made for me! I have made my own choice, and I choose this Sith!'*

The Force continued to resist her, but she pushed harder. She wouldn't let the Force dictate her life, nor the lives of her friends. She wouldn't blindly follow its will like a slave. Then, she was met with success. The bulwark gave way and her power flowed into Aliana freely. She could feel the Force continue to resist her, to try and choke off her point of entry, but with the way open it would be harder to close. She poured her energy into Aliana, slowly but surely. Onlookers witnessed the grey patches on Aliana's skin beginning to dissipate. The dark veins over her eyes started to fade. She was being filled with new life.

But Rey quickly realized that it wasn't enough. So she poured more of herself into Aliana, steadily depleting her own energy faster than she could regenerate it. But it still wasn't enough. She started to panic as she realized that Aliana needed more than she had to give. Especially if she was to be safe long enough to recover and be too strong for the Force to harm. She finally withdrew when she simply couldn't maintain the connection anymore and hunched over Aliana's bed, breathing like she had just run a mile. She felt so tired and weak and sore. And the looming realization that she simply didn't have enough strength to protect her. Not without killing herself to do it.

Weakly, she reached out to grasp Aliana's hand. She squeezed it affectionately as tears began welling up in her eyes again. "...I'm sorry," Rey said through a choked sob. "I-I'm not strong enough."

“You are,” came a hoarse voice from behind her.

Rey turned around and wiped her eyes, seeing a face she hadn’t expected to see again when she and Aliana had left Ahch To without so much as a goodbye. “Master Skywalker?”

“Ever the observant pupil, aren’t you?” Luke said with a hint of sarcasm. The old Jedi walked over to the other side of Aliana’s bed, kneeling beside her. “I felt her agony through the Force. I know what Ben has done to her. I know she risked her own life to save you. I guess she gets that from her mother.”

Rey’s eyes narrowed into a glare. “Skywalker, I would appreciate you not make comments like that about Aliana’s mother. You’re the reason she had to.”

“I know,” Luke nodded in admittance. “She spent so much of her life alone and without guidance because of me. I can’t bring back what I took from her...” Luke then extended a hand, hovering it over Aliana’s midsection. “...But I can protect her from this.” As he spoke, energy began flowing from him into the Sith Lord. The signs of Aliana’s withering condition began to fade faster and faster. Luke’s own expression remained unreadable, his eyes closed as he channeled more of his energy into her.

“You were right,” he said to Aliana, his voice calm and content. “Remember that. You were right about it all.”

Rey watched as Luke seemed to grow weaker and wearier. His eyes looked sunken and there were dark circles growing underneath. His skin had begun to pale and looked more ghastly than it had on the island. It took a moment before she realized that Luke wasn’t just channeling a portion of his energy. He was channeling all of it.

“...Luke,” she said quietly, “I... I don’t know what to say...”

“Just... Just do us all a favor,” Luke said, turning his gaze over to Rey. “Be better than I was.”

Rey nodded. “I promise.”

Luke closed his eyes and returned his focus to Aliana, and Rey watched as the last of the withered flesh returned to her usual healthy shade. He pulled away from her, breathing heavily and clutching his chest, before he completely vanished from sight.

On Ahch To, Luke fell out of his trance and onto his back on the meditation rock. He felt wearier than he had ever thought possible. Astral projection AND essence transfer combined were not a healthy or sane choice.

He weakly pulled himself up to a sitting position, and turned his head to the sunset. The sight was... overwhelming. He’d never truly appreciated how beautiful the planet was, nor the way the temple had been designed to fully take in that beauty. In his years of exile, devoted to remaining miserable, he ignored what this planet had to offer.

It might have been his double vision, but Luke could swear he was seeing the familiar twin suns of Tatooine. Soon his entire life was flashing before his weary eyes. The good, the bad, the outright bizarre. There were plenty of regrets, of course. Still, Luke found solace in knowing he had spent his last moments putting some good back into the galaxy.

In that fleeting moment, while he was still himself, he was at peace.

Kylo Ren sat forward in his chair as he felt his old Master's passing. He thought that this would bring him satisfaction, but in this experience he could feel what Skywalker had felt as he died. A sense of pride, of relief. Skywalker had chosen to die for something, and Kylo Ren knew exactly what. The Force itself seemed to whisper to him, and he knew.

Darth Amorosa had survived.

The Throne room quaked with his anger. Objects and walls rumbled and cracked under the weight of his rage. The rage he would soon set loose upon the Jedi and Sith. Hopefully before it was too late. He turned his head toward the large window at the hyperspace tunnel and urged the Supremacy to move faster. He couldn't risk them escaping.

Not now.

Not while she still lived.

Rey held Aliana's hand as she watched her. She seemed to show no signs of relapse, so she could only assume Aliana had been right about Luke's family. That they were a vengeance in the Force and had near limitless power at their disposal. That Aliana would survive long enough to heal and be safe for good.

Behind her, Leia was quietly stood in the doorway. Luke had spoken to her before coming to the medbay, and it had given them a chance to have closure with one another. What he'd said about the two kids... it had struck a chord with her.

'They're good kids,' Luke said to her. *'Make sure they make it through this. The galaxy will need them'.* Leia promised him that much. She gave him her word she would look after them. Both of them. Aliana proved she was as much a part of this as any of them.

Stepping quietly towards the bed, she placed a hand gently on Rey's shoulder. "How's she doing?" she asked.

"She's safe," Rey smiled, wiping her eyes. "Luke... saved her life. I almost can't believe it. Luke defied the Force to save her."

"Defied the Force?" Leia asked, squeezing Rey's shoulder comfortingly, "What do you mean?"

"The Force... it lashed out at Aliana because she defied it's will by preventing the Force Bond from connecting me and Kylo Ren," Rey explained. "The Force had plans for me. Plans that involved your son. Aliana wouldn't let it use me. And the Force lashed out at her for it."

Leia reflexively felt... disturbed by this information. Firstly, there was that faint sliver of her heart that had hoped in somehow returning her son to the Light. When she realized that Rey could have been a vector for such a possibility she was rather taken with the idea. It hadn't immediately occurred to her that it was something that Rey wouldn't have wanted for herself and that Aliana closed the bond between them on that basis alone.

As time went on, however, she understood how manipulative it was that she, and the Force, would try and push these two together. Aliana did nothing wrong when she shielded Rey from the bond and Luke deciding to give his life to save the Sith from her ‘punishment’ was evidence of this. She knew her brother wouldn’t have done this if he didn’t think it was the right thing to do.

“Well... I’m glad that Luke saved her,” Leia said with a gentle smile.

“...Thank you, General,” Rey said quietly.

Leia sat down beside her and gently patted her shoulder, “Tell me about it.”

“What?” Rey asked, looking up.

“What happened on Ahch To,” Leia said quietly, gesturing to Aliana, “How did... this happen? When you left you hated her.”

“Oh...” Rey fiddled with her hands awkwardly as she thought about all the time they spent on that planet. “I tried to keep my distance from Aliana at first. She broke my trust and I had to know that she was serious when she said she wanted to earn it back. I tried to be as distant as I could and focus on my training but... but whenever I needed her, she was there. When there was something in Luke’s teachings or Jedi philosophy I didn’t understand, she explained it to me. When Kylo Ren was in my mind just torturing me, she was there to make it go away. The shielding technique she used to keep him out for good was actually very dangerous for her, but she did it anyway, and all because she didn’t want me to feel any pain.”

Her gaze returned to Aliana, who looked healthier and far more peaceful than she had earlier. “All she wanted was for me to be okay, and she proved that by always being there for me when I needed her. I couldn’t keep resenting her for that. I just didn’t have it in me to remain detached.”

“Is that all?” Leia asked, tilting her head slightly, “Because she was there for you?”

“What do you mean?” Rey asked, raising an eyebrow.

“A lot of people are there for you, Rey. That doesn’t mean you’ll fall in love with them,” Leia explained, “There must have been something that made you want to see her as more than a supportive friend. Unless your relationship is based entirely on her sacrifices.”

“Oh no no! Of course not!” Rey said. “There was so much more than that. As I started to open up to her again, I remembered just how... well, just how much I loved being around her. She is so insightful about the Force, the Jedi and the Sith. She is so endearing at how tech illiterate she is despite being so wise. She is such a delight to talk to about anything- oh! And her cooking! Oh my stars, Leia you have not lived until you’ve tasted her cushnip and-” Rey trailed off as she realized she started rambling and cleared her throat awkwardly. “I... after spending so much time trying to keep my distance, I forgot just how much I love her company. She’s smart, funny, sweet and just... so, so beautiful.”

Leia was smiling. Rey had immediately brightened up when talking about how she’d fallen in love with the Sith, and the switch from her worrying over Aliana’s condition to gushing about her was like night and day. “Rey, that’s beautiful. I don’t think I’ve ever seen someone so in love.”

“Really?” Rey asked, suddenly feeling bashful. “I.. I just assumed that this is what love always felt like.”

“Maybe it’s a damning statement about me, but I couldn’t have launched into a spiel like that about Han even if I had three weeks and a speechwriter,” Leia laughed. “But I also mean that you went from looking so bleak to sounding so happy so quickly. That’s a powerful thing.”

Rey smiled to herself. “When you put it like that, I guess it is,” she said softly. “Whenever I had to deal with Kylo Ren, he always tried to convince me that I’m nothing. But Alie... Alie makes me feel like I’m everything.” She reached out and tenderly stroked Aliana’s hand as she spoke.

“Considering why she’s in a coma, I guess to her you really are everything,” Leia said. “You know she told me that you’re the only reason she’s even in this fight.”

“That certainly sounds like her,” Rey admitted before going quiet. “...I can’t let something like this happen to her again, Leia. I... I don’t think I could handle it.”

“I don’t know how to prevent it, Rey,” Leia shook her head. “She simply won’t let you be hurt if she can do something to prevent it. I think that’s a conversation you and her need to have. I don’t think she realizes that losing her would hurt you more than anything else.”

Her free hand clutched the side of the bed as the thought of losing Aliana forever sent a reflexive surge of panic through Rey. “I’ll be sure to talk to her then,” she said with a nod.

Leia squeezed Rey’s shoulder and smiled. “I’m glad to hear that. I don’t know why, but from where I sit she doesn’t seem to put a lot of value in her own life. I think she’s going into every fight expecting not to come back.”

“She said no one in her family ever lived for very long,” Rey explained. “The Beniko line has had a low life expectancy over the generations. I guess she just got used to the idea of not living very long.”

“I think she also got used to not having anyone around to motivate her to avoid death at all,” Leia pondered.

“That does make sense,” Rey said wistfully. “I’ll make sure to keep her motivated then.” She brushed a thumb across the soft skin of Aliana’s hand, noting and admiring how healthy it felt compared to a moment ago. “I want us to live a long and happy life together. That can’t happen if she doesn’t think she’s worth saving.”

“I hope you can get through to her,” Leia nodded as she stood up, “I’d hate to see what happens to you if she dies.”

“That won’t happen. I will get through to her,” Rey said, her voice firm and full of conviction. “I know I will.”

“This is a longshot, Rose,” Rey said as she levitated more engine parts up to Rose, who was trying to convert a skiff into an atmospheric fighter, “You sure this thing can even fly?”

“It’s definitely within the realm of possibility!” Rose said loudly over the sound of her plasma torch welding components in place. “But in the worst case scenario, we have more fortified skiffs!”

“Still, I really want more air support,” Rey continued, “The open salt fields would make it a killing spree for us.”

Rose lifted the welding mask above her face as she looked over their work thus far and contemplated. “We could add a few more power conduits and give the hulls some plasteel covering. They’d be more delicate that way, but the increased power and lighter weight would make them a lot faster while guaranteeing flight capabilities.”

“If we stick to hit and run tactics, I’m sure we’ll manage,” Rey nodded, “Do it. The Fury can cover and take more hits.”

“Will do, Commander!” Rose said with a smile before placing her mask back over her face and resuming her work.

Rey smiled, “Rose, there’s no need to call me Commander. I’m your friend. Aren’t I?”

“You are!” Rose said, her voice once again raised against the hissing of her torch. “I just say that when you’re acting especially like a commander! It feels appropriate!”

Rey laughed again. “Good to know I can project authority. Now if only there was anyone who could promote me to Knighthood.”

“You’re the last remaining Jedi aren’t you?” Rose asked. “I’d say that means you have the authority to knight yourself!”

“I don’t think it’d be appropriate. Not until I’m deemed skilled enough,” Rey shook her head, “If I advance myself before I’m ready I just become another Kylo Ren.”

“Well we certainly wouldn’t want that,” Rose said as she lowered herself down the makeshift scaffolding to begin working on another piece of their craft. “It’s hard to believe that not too long ago, the Resistance was terrified of that guy.”

“One Jedi and Sith tag team later, and he’s a joke,” Rey snickered, “But a joke that still scares the rest of the galaxy.”

“Well knowing that the Jedi have returned to fight against the First Order might help us get more Republic support.” Rose said as she slid a piece of chassi aside to work on the ship's circuitry. “After the Starkiller Incident, much of the Senate is convinced that the First Order isn’t worth going to war with.”

“What do you mean?” Rey balked, almost dropping the chassi piece she was holding, “Are they afraid of losses? They’re already fending off assaults on all fronts!”

Rose leaned over the scaffolding to look at Rey proper as she spoke. “Every senator seems to have their own reasons. Some are arguing appeasement, some are saying the failure of the Starkiller base means they're too inept to worry about, others are worried about the Republic becoming a tyrannical state through war like it did under Palpatine. One way or the other, no one in the Republic is in a hurry to go back to war again.”

“I can’t believe this! This is so short-sighted! The First Order is already encroaching on Republic Space and they want to do nothing?!” Rey practically screamed, “Just because they… wait… they know the only reason Starkiller Base failed was because of a last-ditch move from Alie, right?”

Rose’s brow furrowed as she pondered. “...I’m not sure,” Rose said. “I wasn’t there when High Command told the Republic what happened. Considering that the General has only just recently

started warming up to Aliana she might have omitted her from the report entirely.”

Rey let the plasteel panels drop to the floor, “Someone needs to warn them. They need to know the only reason they’re alive is because of sheer luck. Alie said herself that she gambled with billions of lives doing that. They have to know how dangerous this situation is.”

“You’re right,” Rose said with a frown. “When we find a more permanent base of operations, we can probably send some people out to Coruscant to make our case to the Senate.”

“I want to go with whoever does. I’ve had enough of people downplaying this crisis and I want to yell at someone myself,” Rey growled, levitating the plasteel containers back up to Rose.

Rose took the containers and set to work dismantling them for the panels. “Make sure you get that on holo,” she said with a smile. “It’d be fun to see you tell some stuffy bureaucrats what for.”

“Maybe when they learn who saved all their lives they’ll have a change of heart,” Rey said, anger bubbling just under the surface, “Or just leave us to the wolves.”

“Well whatever the case, I wish you the best of luck,” Rose replied, fitting some of the makeshift panels in place.

Rey wanted to wring the neck of... actually she didn’t know who the Chancellor was now that she thought about it. She honestly couldn’t even picture what the Senate looked like. She imagined a bunch of people sitting in a massive stadium, casting decisions based on who can elicit the most applause.

That was a ridiculous idea, she thought.

“I hope I don’t need it. Besi-” Rey stopped cold and turned her head toward the large hangar door. She could feel the presence of many lives somewhere above them. Many hostile and angry lives, wanting revenge. “They’re here!”

“Who’s he-?” Rose began to ask before seeing the look on Rey’s face and realizing for herself. “Wh- Really!?”

“I can sense them in orbit, get everyone ready!” Rey yelled as she dropped the pieces she was holding and sprinted for the armored hangar door. She could sense the First Order sending dropships with troops and artillery almost immediately as she sprinted for the outside. They needed more time to get what fighters they had in the air.

As she looked up to the sky, she could see the faint shapes of cruisers just coming out of hyperspace. A beat later the alert sounded all throughout the base.

“FIRST ORDER DETECTED IN ORBIT!” the alarm blared overhead. “BATTLE STATIONS EVERYONE!”

Rey sprinted back through the door, the force guiding her movements and giving her speed as she made her way to the War Room. She needed to convene with High Command. See what they could do to buy time for their air support. She sped past Resistance fighters, hoping to be back out to support them on the ground before the first troop transports landed. As she tore through the small mountain base, she skidded to a halt outside the makeshift war room and pulled herself in by the doorframe.

“General! We need more time to get the fighters in the air!” she panted, doubling over on the holoterminal, “Rose isn’t ready to launch yet!”

“We have long range snipers stationed in the trenches outside,” Leia said. “It won’t do much against their artillery though. Once their walkers get into range, they’d have to withdraw.”

Rey glanced around the war room as if looking for some kind of inspiration, when her eyes drifted down to her hands. She hadn’t yet done anything particularly impressive with the Force, the most was throwing the TIE Silencer out of the Raddus’ hangar. But if they were to have any hope of holding out, she’d need to pull something off.

She thought of bringing enemy fighters to the ground, or blasting them out of the sky with lightning. Or... something else she’d think of later. But she needed to do something.

“I’m going out there,” she said, grabbing her lightsaber off her belt.

“Rey! We still haven’t scrambled the fighters!” Holdo warned. “If you go out there now, you’ll face the First Order’s assault alone!”

“Well I’m not going to just let them walk in the gate, now am I?” Rey said, holding up her hand. “Besides, I have some tricks up my sleeve.” She accentuated this by letting lightning crackle between her fingers.

“Rey,” Leia said in a low tone. “This may be a bad situation, but you can’t keep resorting to Dark Side techniques to-”

“Ground forces have landed!” Ackbar interjected, looking at the holo terminal. “Our trench forces are in a firefight!”

“I’m going!” Rey said, turning to leave. She stopped when she felt Leia grab her arm.

“Rey, please. You’ve already been so liberal with the Dark Side, with everything that’s happened the last few days you’re almost certain to fall,” Leia warned her, “I need you anywhere but the front lines.”

“We don’t have that luxury for that,” Rey said, pulling her arm free from Leia’s grasp. “Just make sure you secure the medbay and nothing happens to Aliana.” With that, Rey dashed for the hangar bay doors with inhuman speed.

Leia’s arm fell as she watched Rey leave without another word. She felt sadness wash over her as the Jedi disappeared out of sight. “I lost one to the Dark Side, Rey. Don’t make me lose you too,” she said quietly.

Rey dashed like a madwoman to the shutting hangar bay doors. Shifting her weight, she managed to slide through the remaining gap, a cloud of dust and salt kicking up in front of her while the heavy durasteel doors closed behind her. She quickly returned to her feet and leaped over the trench, much to the confusion of the Resistance soldiers inside.

“Uh, Master Jedi?” said one of the snipers. “You might want to get back here to cover. That’s a lot of ground forces.”

“I’m not going to let you face them down alone,” Rey said, snapping her lightsaber into position and igniting the blades. “I can handle myself, Captain.”

The captain looked unsure but made no attempt to stop her.

Encroaching upon the base were several platoons of foot soldiers. They marched slowly but surely towards the fortification to secure a front line while the First Order continued to land their walkers and other artillery planetside. One trooper standing in front of the battalions spotted the twirling flash of Rey’s saberstaff and extended a single fist into the air, commanding the march to halt. Coming to a stop, the platoons aimed their blasters at Rey when she stepped within range.

Rey took a defensive position and prepared to deflect blaster fire as she watched more ships land in a safe position far out of range of the Resistance base. She looked at the Stormtroopers putting their own bodies as cover. A brief idea struck her, realizing that Finn had turned away from the First Order after just a moment of hesitation. At the very least she could try before she carved them into pieces.

“This is the only chance I will give you,” she yelled, “Drop your weapons and surrender, or you’ll die here.”

She could make out sight of a few troopers tilting their helmets slightly to look at one another. Unfortunately, it wasn’t an indication of compliance as the trooper in front pointed at Rey, commanding the entire company to open fire. The platoons unleashed a flurry of blaster bolts soared in the Jedi’s direction. Rey twirled her lightsaber in a graceful arc around her, letting the Force have free reign of her hand as her blade connected with any blaster bolt on a direct course for her or the snipers behind her. She even, almost as if mocking the troopers, closed her eyes as she continued twirling her lightsaber and stepping back for more momentum.

She’d never done the Soresu form with a double-bladed lightsaber. Aliana had only taught her the single blade. But the principle of constant movement of the blade translated surprisingly well, and she found herself having more success than she had during her training. Her decision to go with a saberstaff had been rewarded and she was all the more grateful to Aliana for encouraging her to find the style that she felt the most comfortable with.

Whether by her bolt deflection or shots from the soldiers in the trench, troopers began falling, thinning the platoons little by little as they approached. Even still, their stride didn’t break as they continued to march at their steady, unabated pace. At the rate the skirmish was going, the troopers would still vastly outnumber them if they reached the entrance to the base.

“Key word being ‘if’,” Rey muttered to herself as she hurled her lightsaber at the advancing platoon. They scattered and tried to move, but her lightsaber flew in a graceful arc cutting through a quarter of the remaining troopers while the rest were open to sniper fire.

“I don’t know how she’s doing it, but she’s making them easy targets,” the Captain said from the trench as he directed another volley.

The troopers attempted to regroup and try to fire on the unarmed Jedi, but instead were met with the painful and lethal fury of her Force Lightning. Rey’s power jolted and arced between an entire platoon, causing a great deal of them to fall to the ground almost immediately. As the spinning saberstaff returned to one hand, she swung her free hand far to the right, an invisible power sending one platoon onto the ground, alive but disoriented, making them easy targets.

“I warned you that you’d die here,” she said to what was left of the first platoon. She flourished her lightsaber threateningly as she advanced, deflecting desperation shots.

A few of the Stormtroopers moved to fasten their blasters aside and draw their stun batons to meet Rey’s lightsaber. Those who were lucky to avoid blaster bolts and draw their weapons before Rey managed to close the distance and began to cut down the unprepared were not fortunate enough to match her swordplay. They were swiftly disarmed and dismembered in a flurry of fiery orange light.

Kylo Ren was watching from his lead walker and looking very displeased. The walkers were still priming and preparing for their advance, but watching the Jedi so effortlessly take down his first platoon was making his already fragile ego become even more wounded.

“Well, Supreme Leader?” Hux asked sarcastically, “Shall we send more cannon fodder? Perhaps this time they will catch the Jedi off guard?”

Kylo clenched his fist whilst attempting to remain composed. “The foot soldiers are inconsequential. We simply need to keep the pressure on and the Jedi will tire. A battle of attrition is one we can afford to win.”

“And what of the Sith? What if she were to join her... lover?” Hux nearly spat the word, “What then?”

“We will deal with them,” Kylo replied firmly. “I struck the Sith down once. I can do it again. She won’t have anyone to save her this time.”

“And yet the Sith continues to get back up,” Hux said dismissively. “Well Supreme Leader, if you are so confident, why aren’t you fighting the Jedi yourself?”

The question gave Kylo pause. His eyes darted to the floor, uncertainty clear on his face. “...She... would seek to play to my ego and prolong the battle, giving the Resistance time to escape.... I shall not rise to her bait. We will press on.”

“You’re scared.”

Kylo whirled around behind him. He’d heard the Jedi whisper into his ear, but nobody was there. Not even a projection. He growled and fumed when he realized the Jedi was exploiting the reopened bond to taunt him, just as he’d done to her on Ahch To.

She was learning too quickly.

“And that’s it!” Rose yelled in triumph, “Five skiffs ready to go with rudimentary armor and weaponry. They’re not very durable but they’ll be good for a few quick strikes. You think you can handle that?” she asked as she looked over the side of the last skiff at Poe.

“In this thing? They won’t even touch me,” Poe said with a confident smile before climbing to the modified skiff. “Alright, everyone, Anyone who doesn’t have an X-Wing to fly, hop in the skiffs! Finn! Get the Fury prepped for Rey and tell her to haul ass back inside.”

“Got it!” Finn said before making his way to the Fury.

Poe turned to look at Chewbacca who stood among the rest of the fighters. “Chewie, you think you can help Rey give cover fire in the Falcon?”

The wookiee gave a growl in affirmation.

“Alright, let’s move people! We gotta get these ships out there five minutes ago!” Poe clapped his hands, beckoning everyone to get to their ships, “We gotta hold out long enough for help to come from somewhere!”

As everyone was heading for the ships, Poe waved for Finn to wait.

“Hold on buddy! I need you to do something else!” Poe reached down to his belt and unhooked something before he tossed it out of the ship and down toward him. Finn reached out and caught it, only then realizing that it was Aliana’s lightsaber. “Rey dropped that while she was getting Alie to the ship. I think she might need it right now!”

“Right!” Finn nodded before turning to run towards the Fury once more. He lifted his wrist to his mouth and began speaking into his personal comm. “Rey! We got the air support ready! We need you to get back and lead the team in the Fury!”

“Understood! On my way!” Rey said over the sound of blaster fire and the searing swings of her lightsaber before the comm cut out.

Finn got onto the ship and prepped the weapons from the cockpit. He had to hand it to Aliana, for all her tech illiteracy she certainly kept the weapons in peak condition and fully stocked. There was enough ordinance here to cripple a Dreadnought.

“Master Finn,” 2V said as he stepped into the cockpit. “I thought it might please you or Miss Rey to know that I relocated Aliana’s pet creature off of the ship. I believe that given the task we are about to undertake, it would be much safer with her in the medbay.”

“Yeah I guess so, as long as it doesn’t eat the wires to her life support systems,” Finn said, laughing at his own dark joke. The thought of a mighty Sith Lord undone by a hungry Porg was too ridiculous even for him.

His train of thought was interrupted by the sounds of rapid footsteps against the durasteel floor. “I’m in! Is everything prepped? Where’s the porg?” Rey asked.

“Yes, and in the medbay with Alie,” Finn replied.

“Good, strap yourselves in.” Rey commanded, immediately taking the pilot’s seat.

Chapter End Notes

If you enjoyed this chapter, leave a comment explaining why. Free content thrives on interaction and feedback.

You Are All Nothing!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Emptiness.

That was all Aliana could see. Emptiness. No sight, no sound, no touch, she couldn't even form a coherent sentence. It was as if her entire body was just drifting through space. A space without any stars. A quite unfriendly space. She didn't like it. Or did she? She didn't know what she liked. All she knew was the drift. Was she even moving? What was moving? What is she? Every thought that bubbled in her brain seemed so far away and so inconsequential.

It was bliss not to think, actually. Only to feel. She felt relaxed. Was that the word? It was hard to remember. Thoughts and memories seemed just out of reach for her for the longest time. How long was it? She couldn't tell. Time didn't seem to move wherever she was. All she knew was the calm. She couldn't even recall how closely she came to the precipice of oblivion before being pulled back to the serene emptiness.

All she knew was that serenity, until suddenly she didn't.

In the indiscernible time she had spent in this void, her faculties seemed to remember themselves ever so slightly. Most importantly was her ability to sense whatever was outside this abyss, and suddenly, she could understand what was outside it was not good.

She felt tension. Fear. A worry that someone wouldn't be walking out of... something... alive. She could feel more fear, a fear of losing... a student? A daughter? A friend? She didn't know what any of those words meant. Determination... a determination to keep focused. To not worry about her. Exactly who 'her' was remains a mystery. All things are a mystery in the void.

'You're doing amazing,' she thought toward whoever was trying to stay focused.

She could feel frustration. Humiliation. Anger. A burning desire for revenge. Someone was quite upset. She didn't quite know why. What had made this presence so angry? She was quite curious indeed. She focused, or at least attempted to remember how, on those feelings. What she found felt... familiar. Like it was someone she knew, if she had the capacity to remember. No, it wasn't like another presence it was... it was like a reflection. It seemed as though she was the cause of this anger. She couldn't fathom how this was the case as she didn't remember who this other presence was. She dismissed the thought, decreeing it not worth attempting to worry about here in the void.

Still, she felt the pull of the conflict. She felt herself drawn to it, but it still remained out of reach. This reality felt... What was the word? Sad? Frustrating? Torturous? She couldn't tell. The capacity to feel something so intensely remained just beyond the ether she found herself in.

All things were beyond her comprehension in the void.

Rey was still for a moment as the Fury's engines hummed to life. She had sworn that, for the briefest of moments, she had heard Aliana's voice tell her she was doing amazing. It had been the most fleeting feeling, but it was there. It was impossible, but...

She allowed a smile to creep to her face as she took the Fury out of the hangar. “Thanks, sweetie. I’m gonna get us out of this alive. You’ll see.”

As the hangar bay doors opened, she lifted the ship off of the ground, not waiting for the heavy durasteel passage to open completely before she shot through it. The Falcon and the rest of the fighters soon followed suit, taking formation and flying towards the freshly dropped artillery. Her gaze turned to Finn and she nodded, prompting him to begin firing upon the walkers. He aimed for the viewports of the siege weapons, wanting to get their attention first and foremost.

The Fury swept toward the walkers and tanks, missiles and bombs tearing out of the weapons bays and toward the assortment of vehicles that had only just begun their advance. Apparently timing was in their favor as they had plenty of time to take out their artillery before it became a threat. As they swept past, Rey could see on the sensor readout that one of the walkers had been destabilized by the impact and was trying to right itself to keep from falling over.

Rey turned her attention to their squadron. Readouts showed that all the fighters, including the modified sciffs were still operational. It seemed both the Fury and the Falcon were successful in drawing their fire.

A flicker through the Force warned Rey of a potential turning of the tide. A squadron of TIE fighters came flying from the orbiting cruiser and began reigning suppressing fire on them. Rey pulled hard on the controls, turning the Fury away from the incoming barrage, the rest of the ships managing to follow her example and evade the blasts. All the same, they were forced to break away from the siege vehicles, offering them time to recover and resume course to the base.

“Poe! You and Chewie break off and draw the fighters away! Everyone else stay with me!” Rey commanded.

“Rey, are you sure about that? That’s a lot of firepower for one freighter and a skiff,” Poe’s voice came over the comm.

Rey frowned. Poe was right. Poe and Chewie were perhaps the best force blind pilots they had, but there was no guarantee the Fighters would even try to pursue them. She thought about it for a moment longer. “Right. Poe? Chewie? Stay in formation. I’ll draw their fire,” she amended before breaking off from the formation. She knew Kylo Ren could sense her presence aboard. He wouldn’t turn down the chance to shoot her down.

Sure enough the Fighters veered in her direction, giving the rest of the squadron breathing room to resume their attacks on the siege weapons.

“Predictable Jedi,” Rey muttered. She paused as she realized that she was also a Jedi, then laughed at the subsequent realization that she was picking up Aliana’s mannerisms. “Oh Leia won’t like that.”

Finn offered a good hearted laugh as he primed the Fury’s weapons. Rey pulled on a lever, causing the Fury to engage it’s reverse thrusters and within a blink, got behind the TIE fighters. Not expecting such a maneuver, the First Order flew right past them, leaving them open to the assault that Finn suddenly unleashed on the unsuspecting fighters. Explosions peppered the sky as between laser cannon fire, concussion missiles and the Fury’s main blaster cannon mounted underneath the cockpit they turned half the fighters into molten slag.

Rey brought the Fury around to try and keep them in an advantageous position as the fighters tried to turn to face them, but the old ship just wasn't maneuverable enough without Aliana focusing on using the Force to augment the ship's turning speed. And Rey herself was too busy juggling the Fury's controls to get a good grip on the ship herself. They soon found themselves on the receiving end of furious laser fire. The shields withheld the barrage, but Rey found difficulty in shaking them off.

In Rey's struggle to evade the assault she suddenly felt an unpleasant ripple in the Force followed by an explosion off in the distance. Her eyes caught the sight of the Falcon in flames before colliding and sliding to the ground of the salt flats.

"Rey! Falcon's down!" Poe said over the comms. "I can't hail Chewie and the walkers are about to light us up!"

Rey froze for a moment, trying to think about what to do. Then an idea hit her. It was impulsive and stupid, but it was all she had. She slammed her palm down on the button to extend the docking ramp and got up from her seat.

"Finn, take the helm and try to hold them off!" she yelled, "I'll take care of the walker!"

"Uh- ok, but what are you goi-" Finn managed to get out before Rey was already out of the cockpit. She rushed out to the airlock and down the docking ramp, barely taking a moment to survey her surroundings before leaping off and rolling onto the hard ground. She quickly rose to her feet and fixed her gaze on a nearby walker that was firing upon their squadron. She narrowed her eyes at the siege vehicle, allowing her anger to well up and crackled through her fingertips. After a moment's preparation, she unleashed her power in the form of furious lightning onto the walker. The machine locked up in place, it's faculties and pilot succumbing to the surge of energy and becoming useless.

But Rey was not done. Her rage only grew and her power along with it. With a twist of her wrist, she lifted the inoperable walker off of the ground. Her open hands slowly closed into fists, resulting in the machine buckling and bending under the crushing weight of her power. Soon, the walker was an unrecognizable ball of condensed metal. If she let go, the mass would fall to the ground with a loud crash, but Rey was more ambitious. Her gaze turned to one of the larger quadrepedic walkers who didn't seem to notice the vehicle on it's flank get so utterly destroyed. With a borderline wicked smile, she extended her hand outward, sending the ball of durasteel directly into the cockpit of the walker, causing it to explode and the remainder of the machine to collapse.

She took a glance toward the smoking wreckage of the Falcon to see Chewie and two Resistance fighters pull themselves out of it. Breathing a sigh of relief, she turned her attention back to the walkers.

Kylo and Hux turned wide-eyed to the walker as it was lifted off the ground and crushed into a ball of twisted durasteel, before being used as a cannonball against a second walker. Both of them were caught off-guard by the sheer display of power from the fledgling Jedi.

"I believe now would be a good time to deal with the Jedi, Supreme Leader," Hux said, his sarcasm gone as he stared at the woman making a death-walk toward the artillery squad.

Kylo stood there, quiet and trembling before addressing Hux. "Tell all of our forces to stand down. Do nothing unless the Resistance attempts to save the Jedi. I'll deal with her myself," he said, making his way towards the airlock as the shuttle began to lower down in front of Rey. Ren

attempted to take a calming breath and focus the entirety of his power for the battle to come. He could succeed. He would succeed. He survived every encounter with the Sith and the Scavenger and became stronger and stronger as a result. He made the Sith fall before him, proving himself superior in his use of the Dark Side. He would prove that again. He had to.

Because he had no idea what he would do if he couldn't.

Rey turned to the central walker as Kylo Ren's shuttle dropped down from the bay and flew down to land several hundred feet away from her. Rey watched as the Dark Jedi stepped out of the shuttle, his lightsaber in his hand as he approached. The last time she'd seen him, he had just stabbed the woman she loved.

Now she would make him pay.

She separated her lightsaber and held a hilt in each hand, ready to activate them at a moment's notice.

"You've become powerful," Kylo said, brushing the cape off of his shoulders. "You could have become stronger. You could have stood beside me as we commanded the First Order together. But you didn't, and now you will die."

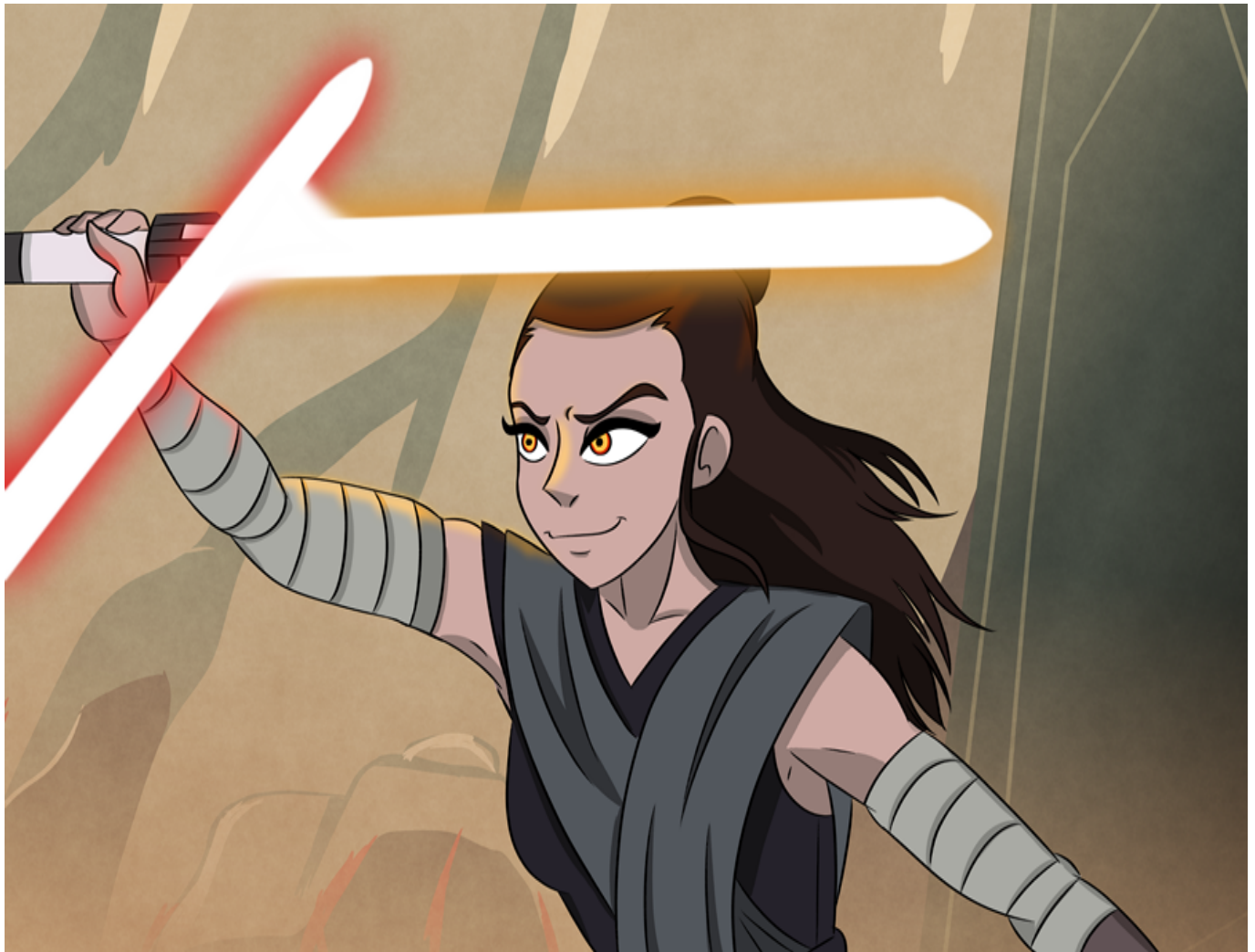
Rey said nothing, only narrowing her gaze as she watched Kylo point his lightsaber at her, but taking no step further.

"Do you think this matters?" he sneered. "You've already failed. You tried to fulfill your destiny. You failed. You tried to save the Resistance from us. You failed. You sent the Sith to kill us all. You failed. You failed to prove yourself as a Jedi. You just keep failing! But I have not. I have taken over the First Order. I have become the most powerful man in all the galaxy! And I will destroy the Resistance, the Sith, and you, once and for all. Today, the past will die!"

Rey activated her lightsabers and glared Kylo Ren down. "You've been left humiliated and disgraced every time you've come into contact with me or Alie. She defeated you with her bare hands. I threw you out of the Raddus AND carved your face apart on Ilum. And striking Alie down isn't a victory for you. She LET you strike her down. Why do you think this time will be any different?"

Kylo's eye twitched. Rey remained unfazed by his words. She always buckled under his words before. This was not supposed to happen. He didn't answer Rey's question with words. He couldn't even if he wanted to. Instead he charged, a hoarse roar ripping from his throat before he wound back and brought his crimson blade down onto Rey, momentum and dark power fueling his downswing.

A powerful strike with all of his strength and momentum that he'd seen shatter someone's arms during training... that proved fruitless against the Jedi with a raise of a single hand.



Rey stopped his attack dead, the Jedi looking up at him with a wry smirk. Her eyes burned with the Dark Side of the Force as she was filled with glee at the pain and humiliation she was about to inflict on this would-be Emperor for what he'd done to her and Aliana. With a turn of her wrist, Kylo's lightsaber was shunted harmlessly to the side and the same hand came up to give a warning slash to his forehead as she spun around his side and grazed him with her off hand.

Kylo shouted in pain, nearly falling over. He managed to stay on his feet, despite how desperately his legs wanted to give out. He tried to push past the pain, and then he focused on it. The searing agony on his forehead and side. Adding it to his anger and hate for the Jedi, he swung again at her, his dark power once again channeled into a high downward cleave. Just as before, it was stopped dead by Rey with one arm behind her back before she whirled around Ren and slashed him twice more along his leg. He let out a choked cry of pain before falling to his knees.

How? How was the Jedi so constantly defeating him so easily?!

Rey paced around behind him, glaring down at the Dark Jedi like a Vornskr circling its prey. "What was that you said about me failing to achieve my destiny?" she asked. She was only partially curious, if only to see how deep Kylo Ren's insanity went.

Kylo choked and spit on the salty ground beneath him as he tried to mutter a response. "...Y-You could have ruled the galaxy... with me." he croaked out. "...B-But you chose to die... with the rest of the r-rebel trash..."

“The only ones I see dying are your forces... and you,” Rey said quietly, kneeling down behind him, “You haven’t conquered the galaxy. You’re going to die here. What deludes you to think you can rule the galaxy?”

“I-I carry the blood of Darth Vader in my veins!” He shouted, trying to pull himself off of the ground. “It is my birthright to claim what he never could! He was destined to rule the galaxy, and I will see that destiny fulfilled, as his successor. My blood is one of power! Of the Dark Side! You have no bloodline! You come from nothing! You’re nothing!”

“Darth Vader was a decrepit corpse walking around in a mobile iron lung,” Rey said, smirking at Kylo Ren’s failed struggle to get back to his feet. “He was a pathetic excuse for a Jedi who let Darth Sidious manipulate him because he had a bad dream. And for all his power in the Force, that didn’t stop another Jedi from cutting off all his limbs and setting him on fire.”

Rey stood up and deactivated her lightsabers.

“You don’t come from a mighty bloodline. Vader was the only powerful Force User in your family. And he came from a family of slaves who grew up with nothing,” Rey continued. “*You* come from nothing.”

She looked up at the looming walkers and assault vehicles, belonging to a pack of rabid wolves that so desperately believed that they were the rightful heirs to the galaxy, clinging to a legacy of nothing but complete and utter failure, and had only succeeded in hounding her and her friends. Delusional fools subsisting on the fantasies of sore old men who couldn't accept that they'd lost for decades. She hated every last one of them for having made her and the people she loved suffer for the sake of their deranged crusade. She stood up straight and yelled to what she saw as the entire First Order, "You... ARE ALL... **NOTHING!**" Her voice had been amplified by the Force, causing the ground under her feet to crack and a strong echo ring out against the mountain behind her

Kylo let out another hoarse cry as he reactivated his lightsaber and swung blindly at Rey, only for him to fully collapse onto the ground without her even having to evade his attack.

“How sad,” Rey said, shaking her head in disappointment before extending one hand and allowing lighting to shoot from her fingers and into the defeated Dark Jedi. Kylo Ren twitched and writhed on the ground, his jaw locked shut by the electricity and unable to make a sound. "Why did I ever let a pathetic wretch like you frighten me so?"

On the lead walker, the pilot looked back at Hux, “Shall I fire on the Jedi, General?” He was confused why they were allowing the Supreme Leader to be tortured without aid.

“In a moment, Captain,” Hux smiled. “The Jedi is making my week.”

Hux’s smile of twisted glee was matched only by Rey’s, who watched as Kylo Ren wriggled helplessly under her power. After all the time he had tormented her, invaded her privacy, belittled her at every turn, even bringing harm to the woman she loved, Rey had shown him once and for all that he could never touch her again. And now, he would take that knowledge to his shallow grave.

“Alright, I got it on holo now,” Hux said, satisfied. “Open fire.”

Rey’s head snapped up to the walkers before their lasers had even left their cannons and jumped back from where she was standing. With a graceful backflip, she landed twenty feet away from where she'd been standing. A half a second later, her previous position was kicking up red dust as

the entire fleet of AT-ATs tunneled everything they had into that one position, while remaining safely obscured by the cloud. Cursing herself for delaying too long in killing the grease bag, she turned and sprinted back for the base. Next time, she thought.

As she darted back inside the base, the heavy durasteel doors closed behind her. Rey stepped briskly through the hanger as Rose, Holdo and the Rest of High command approached her.

“We have a problem,” Amilyn said.

“Tell me it’s not Aliana,” Rey said, a hint of desperation in her voice.

“She’s stable and ready for transport, but with the First Order at the gate as they are, we are out of avenues of escape,” Amilyn explained. “That door is the only way in or out.”

“Have we suffered any casualties?” Rey asked.

“About sixty. We’re down to less than two hundred.”

Rey thought for a moment and then closed her eyes, reaching out with the Force to try and find another way out of the base. In her mind she could see the entire complex. Every tunnel, every crevice, every deep track into the mountainside. She could see the dead-ends and the holes dug by animals too small for them to fit through. There had to be something.

Suddenly, she caught it. Something she almost dismissed as another dead end. One of the burrows used by the animals was through a pile of boulders. A mass not attached to the expansive mass of stone that made up the cavern. Something she could easily move out of the way.

“I got it,” Rey said before taking out her personal holocom and punching something into it before handing it over to Holdo. “Tell the squadron to land at these coordinates and follow me. I found a way out of here.”

Amilyn pulled out her holocom and radioed the squadron, “Finn! Poe, get everyone around the back of the mountain! We found a way out!”

Rey pointed in the direction of the exit as she sped off ahead of them, taking them down the winding and twisting caverns and deeper into the base. “What happened to our contacts?” she asked as Holdo and the others caught up.

“We didn’t hear anything from the Republic,” Amilyn said in between heavy breaths. “But we tried reaching out to Aliana’s outer rim contacts. We got one response. A set of coordinates somewhere in wild space.”

“From who?” Rey asked, raising an eyebrow.

“They didn’t say,” Amilyn said with a frown. “It’s the only response we had, though. We have nothing else to act on.”

“Alright, might as well make the most of it,” Rey sighed. She took a mournful look as Aliana was wheeled along the cavern, her bed hooked up to a mobile rebreather mask. She didn’t like going into wild space blind, and was hoping she would be awake to provide the advice and wisdom she so desperately needed.

Rey turned her attention to the pile of boulders before them. She took a deep breath, closed her eyes and extended an arm. With a violent rush of air, the rocks exploded from the entrance and slammed into the mountainside opposite the canyon. The sheer force of the explosion caused the ground to quake as everyone ran out looking for their ships. The Fury was already waiting for them just outside, with the X-Wings flying overhead in a patrol route. With no cruisers left, and fewer people than they'd landed with, the Fury would have had to do as an escape vessel. Rey directed everyone to the Fury and told them all to find some place comfortable for the journey. As the few remaining members of the Resistance boarded, Leia stopped and stood beside Rey.

"I saw what you were doing out there," she whispered, "Why didn't you kill him?"

Rey was silent for a beat. "I wanted him to understand that he had no more power over me," she admitted. "I got greedy. It won't happen again," she affirmed before moving up the docking ramp.

"Rey, this is what I was talking about," Leia said, following after her. "You got so wrapped up in revenge that you couldn't stay focused on the mission. You let the Dark Side flow through you, and look where it got you? You need to step back and center yourself. Embrace the Light again and don't let your emotions dominate you like this."

Rey let out an exasperated sigh. As much as she didn't want to admit it, Leia was right about this. The reason Kylo Ren kept coming back was because neither she nor Alie followed through in killing him. Whether it was because of ego or external factors, they kept letting him go and he kept coming back to do more damage.

"I understand, General." Rey said, facing Leia as they stepped inside the Fury. "I promise you, I won't dawdle like that again. The next time I encounter Kylo Ren, he dies. You have my word."

Leia winced at Rey's words and didn't respond, only stepping past her and quietly boarding the Fury. Rey shook her head and stepped fully on board. The docking ramp closed when she was fully on board and she felt the ship lift off into the air.

"You failed to kill me."

Rey scoffed and turned around to see Kylo Ren standing behind her. He wasn't really there, she could sense he was in the base's war room, wondering where all the rebels were.

"I won't make that mistake again."

Rey kept her eyes trained on him. She watched as he began to tremble and in a blink he was gone. She sighed and turned back to the Fury's main flight deck and nearly ran headfirst into 2V.

"Oh! Miss Rey! I do believe I have something you may appreciate!" the droid said happily.

"What's that?" Rey asked, looking up at 2V with a mixture of exhaustion and curiosity.

"Well, I was thinking that as a long-term patient, Miss Alie would simply be taking up space in the medbay," 2V explained as he led Rey toward Aliana and Rey's shared quarters. "So I took the liberty of setting up Miss Alie's life support and regenerative systems in your quarters. It all tucks neatly into a corner by the bed, so Miss Alie can remain in her quarters while she heals. By happenstance, this also means you may continue sharing sleeping arrangements with Miss Alie for the duration of our trip to Odessen!"

“You’re se-” Rey began to ask before she stepped inside the quarters to see that 2V was true to his word. Aliana laid on their bed, safe and secure with all her important systems neatly tucked beside her in the corner. She walked over to Aliana, carefully brushing her fingers over her forehead to part her unruly locks of curly hair. She looked so peaceful and calm like this. Soon, Rey’s eyes started to water.

“Thank you, 2V,” Rey said, wiping her eyes. “W-Where did you say we were going again?” she asked, trying to sound casual.

“Odessen, Miss Rey,” 2V explained. “It is the planet in Wild Space that the Gungan gave to Admiral Holdo. It is actually Miss Alie’s home.”

Rey blinked in surprise. Alie’s home. The home planet of the Beniko family. Knowing that was their destination filled Rey with a certain degree of comfort. Enough so that she didn’t even feel the need to ask 2V who this Gungan was, or what he was doing in Wild Space. “That sounds lovely,” Rey said with a smile. “I’m sure Alie will appreciate waking up at home.”

“Miss Alie hasn’t actually spent much time on Odessen in the last ten years,” 2V added. “The planet is so far out of the way, and Miss Alie did most of her business in the Outer Rim. In fact, the last time she was on the planet was when she realized she needed a new Hyperdrive coil and set route to Jakku to trade for one.”

“... Huh,” Rey said simply. “It’s funny how things work out like that.” Her gaze returned to Aliana. This wonderful woman who came into her life through sheer luck and whom she wouldn’t give up for the galaxy. When she thought about how easily she could have missed the best thing that happened to her, it was hard to believe that the Force was trying to guide her to someone else.

“I don’t know why the Force doesn’t see what a wonderful woman you are,” she whispered, stroking Aliana’s hair. One of the machines beside the bed started beeping and blinking a red light, but before Rey could turn her attention to it, something truly unexpected happened.

Aliana stirred.

Her head turned in the direction of Rey as her eyes slowly cracked open. She winced and flinched from the pain of her still healing injuries, but once she made eye contact with Rey she immediately stopped and smiled up at her. “Hi...” she said weakly.

Rey stared wide eyed at Aliana, before immediately starting to tear up. “H-Hi...” she said with a smile, before reaching out to ever so gently hold her hand. “How’re you feeling?”

“Like... I’ve been... run over... by a speeder,” Aliana breathed, weakly lifting her arm to brush her fingertips against Rey’s cheek.

Rey took the hand that Aliana cupped her cheek with and squeezed it affectionately. “Don’t worry, darling,” she cooed softly. “The pain will pass. You’re going to make a full recovery, and I’ll make sure you never get hurt this badly again.”

“Oh... sweetie... it’s okay, I... just wanted to... keep you safe,” Aliana whispered, her voice so hoarse that a whisper was all she could muster. “I... miscalculated...”

“I know, I know,” Rey said soothingly, moving to lay beside Aliana in the bed. “But I want to keep you safe too. I love you Aliana. I don’t want to be without you. I don’t want you to die for me. I

need you to *live* for me. Can you do that?"

"I said... that I... would..." Aliana whispered, turning her head to the other side to face her, "I'm sorry... I... didn't stick... the landing..."

"Shhh," Rey whispered, her eyes locked with Aliana's. "Just take it easy. You need time to heal. I'll keep you safe until then."

"My... hero..." Aliana let out a strained giggle as she pulled herself closer to Rey and took her hand. "I... love you... Rey. You've been... the best thing... to happen to me... in a long time..."

"I love you too, Aliana Beniko," Rey said, leaning forward to kiss Alie's forehead. "You're irreplaceable to me. I never want to lose you."

Aliana smiled and strained as she lifted herself to reach Rey's lips, giving her a chaste kiss as she settled back down into her pillows. "Ow! Worth it... back hurts... but Jedi pretty."

The door to their quarters opened and 2V stepped inside, "Pardon me Miss Rey, but I've been informed that Miss Alie's sedative injector has malfunctioned."

Rey's attention turned to the life support device to recall the mechanism that was blinking red. Aliana woke up because the device keeping her under malfunctioned. Meaning Alie would have to go under again. "Oh... right," she said, suddenly somber and wistful.

"At least... let me... say goodnight..." Aliana said, looking back out of the corner of her eye at 2V as he was fiddling with the machine.

"Very well Miss Alie, but make it quick!"

"Impeccable... beside... manner..." Aliana muttered turning back to Rey, her breathing heavier as she looked like talking was leaving her winded. "Goodnight Rey... I love you... so much... you mean... everything to me..."

"I love you too, Aliana," Rey responded, leaning forward to kiss Aliana once more. "Goodnight, my beautiful Sith. I'll be here when you wake up."

Aliana smiled warmly as 2V reactivated the sedative injector. Within seconds, her eyes closed and her hands fell limp as she slipped back into an induced coma. And just like that, this brief moment where Rey had Aliana back was gone. Just like that, she was back to looking at a still, sleeping body.

"Mister Finn, Captain Dameron and I can tend to other passengers for the time being, if you need your rest, Miss Rey," 2V offered as he made his way to the door.

"Yes please," Rey said softly, not taking her eyes off of Aliana.

The droid nodded and closed the door behind him.

"Once again the Resistance has managed to escape," Phasma sighed wearily as she handed the datapad to Hux. Their team had been scouring the base from top to bottom looking for stragglers, but had found nothing. Aside from some spare supplies that hadn't been packed, there was little to help them track down the Resistance a third time.

“Once again our Supreme Leader has allowed himself to be outwitted by the Jedi,” Hux scoffed, “Though strange that I saw no sign of the Sith anywhere.”

“We found what appeared to be the makings of a medbay in one of the smaller caverns. They must have treated her wounds there,” Phasma deduced. “With how powerful she and the Jedi have become, they pose a great threat to us.”

“Our mistake was letting Kylo Ren handle them. From here on out, we’ll appoint specialists to deal with them,” Hux replied, overlooking just how desolate the base was. “Besides, we intercepted no transmissions from the Republic so the Resistance is still without support. They’re on their last leg. We’ll get them.”

“Sir, with the Republic redoubling efforts on their borders and the Resistance left with only a single corvette and a few fighters, would it not make more sense to focus our efforts on the Republic front?” Phasma asked as she went through the few small objects her troops had managed to recover. “Leaving the Supremacy to pursue the Resistance to the edges of the galaxy seems like a waste when it could be pushing into Coruscant.”

“Oh I absolutely agree, Captain,” Hux said, stepping closer so that only Phasma could hear. “However you know how single minded our Supreme Leader can be. It’s worth it to appease his wishes in some capacity. Just to feed the illusion he’s truly in charge.”

“Very well, sir,” Phasma said as her fingers ran over something interesting. Pulling it out of the crate of salvage, she found a silver and black lightsaber. She looked it over until she found something on the pommel that peaked her interest. “Sir, I believe you’ll want to take a look at this.”

She handed the lightsaber to Hux, who turned it over in his hands until he saw the pommel. There he saw an engraving to the Jedi from Darth Amorosa. An exceedingly romantic engraving.

“Oh...” Hux said, as the pieces fell into place in his mind. They knew the Jedi and Sith were connected somehow, but not to such a degree. He had assumed such claims were just Kylo Ren being jealous, but it seemed as though there was some merit behind them.

“Well then, I believe we could use this new intel to our advantage,” he said with a pleased smile.

“And what advantage would that be?” Phasma asked. “Do you expect the Jedi will come looking for it?”

“A little known truth about the galaxy, Captain. Any relationship that is not strictly professional can always be exploited,” Hux explained. “Sentiment makes fools of everyone. I imagine it’s how Kylo Ren managed to defeat the Sith last time. Now that we know that, we can proceed accordingly.”

“And what would that be, Sir?” Phasma asked, now genuinely intrigued as to what Hux was thinking.

“With how... passionate we’ve seen our Supreme Leader be, you and I know how strongly Force sensitives can feel emotions. I dare say the Jedi and Sith are more devoted to each other than the Resistance itself. All we need to do is lure one away, and the other will follow, leaving the rabble all but defenseless.” He gave the lightsaber back to Phasma. “Search the base thoroughly for clues. Tell our archivists to search through all the data we’ve collected on those two. We’ll find a definite edge for sure.”

“With all due respect, General. Didn’t Supreme Leader Snoke attempt such a tactic before and find it to be ineffective?” Phasma asked, taking the lightsaber from him. “Your own report states that the Sith threw him off easily and any attempt to turn them to the First Order had failed.”

“We aren’t trying to turn them to our cause,” Hux said. “We just need a distraction or a trap that allows us to lure them away from their allies. No pontification. Just classic divide and conquer.”

“Very well, Sir.” Phasma nodded as she turned and left the General to his scheming.

Hux smirked as he looked out the base’s viewport at their artillery stationed and ready for transport back to the fleet. Soon he would have the Resistance in his grasp, and soon he would be able to refocus his efforts on crushing the Republic once and for all.

“How’s your arm?” Finn asked as he set a thermos of water down in front of Poe.

“Fine, just some shrapnel,” Poe nodded as he accepted a hug from Finn. “I’ll be alright. At least I’m not dead.”

“Alright, just make sure you take the stuff 2V gave you, alright?” Finn asked. “We don’t want you losing function in your shooting arm or anything?”

“Yeah, yeah I got it,” Poe said, pulling the medpac 2V provided him out of his pockets. “Regular injections every 24 hours for three days.”

“Good, don’t make me have to inject you myself,” Finn chuckled.

“You two are adorable,” Rose snickered, “You’re like Rey and Alie.”

“Slander,” Poe muttered before giving Finn’s shoulder a hearty pat. “Finn and I are way more suave than those two.”

“Yup. We are peak suave,” Finn nodded.

“You fuss over each other like hens, you aren’t suave at all,” Rose scoffed, taking a sip of her own water. “All you’re missing is for Poe to be neurotic and Finn to have a chronic lack of self-preservation.”

“I mean, you were in that coma for a while,” Poe said, turning to Finn.

“Whu-? Oh I’m sorry, you’re taking her side now?” Finn asked, looking indignant. “I thought we were a united front!”

“Hey, between a Stormtrooper and a Sith I know which one not to piss off!” Poe snickered, elbowing Finn with his good arm.

Finn frowned. “Well see if I ever bother getting you water again. Get your own water from now on, why don’t you?”

“Aw, Finn don’t be like that,” Rose teased. “I’m sure Poe didn’t mean it.”

“Yeah, I’m just playing,” Poe smirked.

“There see? Now kiss and make up, you too,” Rose teased.

“Yeah I don’t think so,” Finn laughed.

“Well, that’s a shame,” Poe said with exaggerated disappointment, earning another bout of giggles from Rose. “I was looking forward to that part.”

“Good. Suffer,” Finn smirked. He got up from the table and retreated to the cargo hold. 2V had been pulling out collapsible bunks for the last three hours to line the unused rooms on the ship with. With any luck, there would be enough beds for a good portion of the crew to sleep in shifts.

“That man knows how to be petty,” Poe laughed, taking another drink.

“Don’t worry, Captain.” Rose said with a smirk. “You’ll get that kiss someday and it will be so romantic. We’ll be planetside, the sun will shine radiantly onto the both of you, all the plants around you will flower and bloom and nearby critters will be cheering you both on. It’ll be great.”

“And how much of your time do you spend watching romance holos?” Poe asked.

“Aliana has a lot of them in the ship’s database, it’s been like a goldmine for me,” Rose said with a look that screamed ‘Don’t judge me!’

“I never would have pegged Aliana for a romance buff,” Poe shrugged.

“You what!?” Rose asked incredulously. “You’ve seen how Aliana is around Rey and you don’t think she’s a romance buff? Have you not been paying attention?”

“I just assumed she was gay and hopelessly in love with a pretty girl,” Poe scoffed as he injected his arm, “I didn’t think she was a connoisseur or however the Twi’leks say it.”

“Oh, my stars. Twi’lek romance holos are some of the best,” Rose said with a sigh. “Have you seen ‘The Tip of my Lekku’? Kriffing brilliant! I’ve watched that like a hundred times growing up.”

“No. You see I don’t have much time for romance holos because I’m usually out living them with beautiful men and women of the galaxy,” Poe said, raising an eyebrow.

“Oh really?” Rose asked, looking amused as she leaned back in her seat. “Well by all means! Tell me about the many romantic escapades of one Captain Poe Dameron! Don’t be shy. Share with us!”

“No, I think I’ll pass on that thanks,” Poe laughed as he sat back and took another drink of water, “The moment I tell you is the moment some jilted ex boyfriend or girlfriend tracks us down and blows the ship to smithereens.”

“You know, I’d call bantha shit on that, but you do have the makings on a chronic heart breaker,” Rose said with a shrug. “Do you happen to know which one took it the hardest or were you long gone by the time any of them were aware that they’ve been had?”

“Ha! I do know! Girl I used to fly with before I joined the Republic fleet. She chased my ship down for about three days before I finally shook her,” Poe laughed, “That was the reason I joined the Republic fleet, actually.”

Rose nearly choked on her water in a fit of laughter. “You needed a government military force to keep between you and your ex! Oh that is kriffing beautiful!”

“There’s no better place to hide from smugglers than right in the middle of the Republic Navy,” Poe insisted with a chuckle.

Rose smiled before taking another sip of water. “Which reminds me. Once we land, Rey might be going to Coruscant to appeal to the Senate on our behalf. It’s not in stone yet. We haven’t even run the plan by High Command yet, but with how things have been going lately, we think it’s a necessity.”

“What does Rey want to talk to the Senate for?” Poe asked, raising an eyebrow.

“To convince them that the First Order is a problem worth dealing with,” Rose said. “We’re hoping the presence of a Jedi will help them see things our way. No guarantee of that, of course, but it’s worth a try.”

“You sure Rey’s still a Jedi? She’s looking more and more like a Sith every day,” Poe scoffed. “Not saying that’s a bad thing, but the Senate is still pretty skittish about Sith Lords.”

“Yeah, that is an excellent point,” Rose admitted with a shrug. “I’m honestly not sure myself. Rey’s technically the first Jedi I’ve ever met so I have no frame of reference. I just call her a Jedi until she asks me otherwise,” she paused for a moment, swishing the water in her container lightly.

“Honestly though, with how Rey and Alie have helped turn the tide as they had, the Senate can take their skittishness and shove it as far as I’m concerned.”

“Agreed. But if they shove it, then we’re on our own,” Poe warned her. He’d seen how slow to react the Senate could often be. Even after Starkiller Base they were still choosing to just turtle on the borders of Republic space. Open war had been declared, and they were still sitting on their hands. And the last time he’d heard word from Coruscant, rumors of a Sith being in the Resistance were starting to make Senators panic.

“True,” Rose conceded, falling quiet again. “Let’s hope diplomacy is one of the skills inherent to the Jedi.” She peered through the crowd on the ship to look at the door where she knew Rey was behind, resting beside Aliana. “I also hope she’s ready for such a mission, considering everything those two have been through lately.”

“Yeah, not gonna lie Rose. I don’t think it’s a good idea for Rey to be going out there,” Poe shook his head. “The Senate are obstinate and infuriating. And with how on edge Rey already is, she might kill someone. I think it’d be best if she got a good long rest before taking on any more missions.”

Rose winced slightly. “That’s... not impossible,” she said with a frown. “I’m hoping reason will prevail, but I do understand how stressful Coruscant can be. ...I guess we’ll just have to see what High Command suggests.”

“I’m holding out hope that Leia won’t let Rey do this. It’s not good for her to be under this much stress.”

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Folly of Jedi and Sith Alike

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The atmosphere in the Fury's conference room was tense. The battle on Crait had left everyone exhausted and feeling a little more than hopeless. Starting out with a strength of six hundred, the Resistance had been slowly whittled down to a crew of one hundred fifty packed into one small Corvette. And with the prospect of a several week flight to Odessen with stops to refuel and resupply along the way, the anxiety and fear would continue to permeate the air of the ship until they finally settled down in a permanent home.

Rey seemed to be the least exhausted of the bunch, though she did have private quarters to sleep in. It seemed Aliana being set up in the same bed made her feel nominally better.

"According to the Fury's database, there's an old Eternal Alliance base that we can salvage for materials and components," Leia explained, rubbing her eyes as she tried to focus on the holoterminals she had set on the table. "However I don't want to just move into the base. It's visible from orbital scanners and we need a little more assurance of protection than that. If the First Order finds Odessen, I want them to think we've already left."

"Our lessened manpower will mean we are less capable of building an entire base from scratch, General," Admiral Ackbar offered. "If there's usable technology inside this base, that may very well offset it's disadvantageous location."

"We've already found a few strategic locations," Holdo replied, pointing to a few highlighted spots on the holomap. "After committing to a point of construction, we'll have one team traveling to and from the old base for supplies while the other team constructs and fortifies the base."

"The Eternal Alliance base also serves as a distraction. It's more likely to take enemy fire if discovered, giving us even more cover from the other side of the planet," Leia continued. "We've run the numbers. We can get the base built within a couple of months, and running at minimal operational capacity within one."

Poe stepped towards the holoterminal, looking at all the data being displayed. "Do we know for sure that any of the material components in that base are of any use?" he asked. "It has been thousands of years since any of this tech was even touched, if the records are right."

"Alliance Era tech is sturdier than most in galactic history," Rose explained, gently rapping on one of the Fury's walls. "Their stuff is built to last, not fall apart the minute the manufacturer comes out with a new model."

"Actually Rose, the Fury is Sith Empire tech," Rey explained, "And it's a warship. The state of the Alliance base is still up in their air. It'll all depend on how much Aliana's family has been maintaining it while they lived on the planet."

"Alie's family lived on this planet?" Finn asked, arching a brow.

"Her ancestors were the one who founded the Alliance," Rey answered. "Lana Beniko and Darth Caida rallied Republic and Imperial forces to fight against the armies of Zakuul."

“Time is a flat circle,” Finn scoffed.

“Trust me, it gets more freaky than that,” Rey snickered. “Speaking of which, while I have you all here I have a proposal.”

“Oh, and what would that proposal be?” Leia asked, curiosity momentarily overcoming her fatigue.

“Once the base is complete enough to be lived in, I’m taking the Fury to Coruscant to petition the Republic for assistance,” Rey explained. “We need their help against the First Order and they can’t afford to be ignoring this threat so long as their borders are secure. I don’t want to have to rely on calling in Alie’s favors for the rest of this war.”

High command looked at each other as they collectively pondered the idea.

“We’ve been trying to get the Republic’s aid for some time now,” Amilyn said wistfully. “No such luck.”

“Perhaps their opinion on the matter will shift when they see a Jedi walk into the halls of the Republic once more,” Ackbar replied, his guttural voice full of an unusual optimism.

“I object to this idea, General.” Poe said, stepping forward. “The Senate is extremely skittish, and I’m not sure Rey will be of any comfort to them. It’s actually been difficult to tell if she’s Jedi or Sith, and the Republic has already heard rumors of a Sith in the Resistance and they are not happy about it. Any excursion to Coruscant is likely to worsen the situation with the Senate.”

Leia rested her chin against her forefinger and thumb as she contemplated. Her gaze shifted between Poe, who seemed rather resolved in his conviction, and Rey, who looked rather indignant at the Captain’s lack of support. After a moment longer, she stepped in front of Rey. “Rey, my dear. I cannot in good conscience send you to Coruscant...” she paused for a beat, “...Without me to help vouch for you.”

“General, with all due respect, Rey’s been under so much stress lately that to subject her to the Senate would be tantamount to torture,” Poe argued. “They are ruthless and Rey is still in desperate need of some proper rest. You send her out there and she’ll be pushed to her breaking point.”

“Which is why I will accompany her and ensure things go as smoothly as possible,” Leia responded. “I may have lost a great deal of my influence in the Republic, but I still know the game of politics very well. Bringing Rey along will be an optimal time to pass those lessons onto her. Now of course, if you still have your reservations, Captain, you are free to come along and make sure that Rey doesn’t decapitate any Senators.”

“It’s not the Senators I’m worried about, though that does remain a concern General.” Poe explained, glancing at Rey, “I think it would be best if someone else handled the Senate and Rey got the rest she needs.”

Rey pinched the bridge of her nose and took a deep breath. “Poe while I appreciate the concern, I think I am perfectly capable of handling a diplomatic mission without reaching my breaking point.”

“Rey, you have bags under your eyes,” Poe argued. “You need to rest. You’ve been going non stop since the Supremacy and you’ve only slept once.”

“Twice!” Rey said indignantly, crossing her arms. “Okay, yes I suppose I’m a little worn out, but I can afford to do that. I’m trained to have that level of stamina.”

“You are still only human, Rey,” Holdo said, concern etched on her expression.

“You’re both being melodramatic. I’m fine.” Rey scoffed.

Poe folded his arms. “What would Aliana think if she saw you burning the candle at both ends like this?”

“Alie has no room to talk after she went against basic survival instincts on the Supremacy like that!” Rey countered sharply.

“Alright, alright,” Leia groaned, silencing the room with a wave of her hand. “We’ll table the matter for now and discuss it again when we’ve established the base on Odessen.” Her attention returned to the exasperated Jedi. “And Rey, if by then you manage to get that much needed rest, then I will allow you to accompany me to Coruscant. Otherwise, I will be going alongside Amilyn.”

“But General-”

“No buts. From this point on, you’re on shore leave.” Leia said firmly. “Killing Snoke, disabling the Supremacy, fighting my son twice alongside two Knights of Ren and an entire platoon of Stormtroopers is more than enough to warrant at least two weeks of rest.”

Rey fell silent, unable to counter Leia’s words. So instead she just lowered her head in a polite nod. “Yes, General,” she said, fatigue suddenly heavy in her voice.

“Good.” Leia turned back to the rest of High Command. “We’re meeting with another of Amorosa’s contacts when we drop out of Hyperspace around Nar Shaddaa. I don’t know exactly who it is, only that they’re going to be in a Hutt Dreadnought. Everything else about them requires database access that we don’t have.”

“No offense is intended with the restrictions, I assure you,” 2V said. “The Beniko family is quite insistent that their information remain out of the hands of the general public.”

“So why does Rey get to dig through as much info as she pleases?” Finn asked, glaring at the droid.

“It was done in reconciliation of the fact that Miss Rey was the last among you to know that Aliana was a Sith,” 2V explained. “Perhaps she would have granted you all access if she was more concerned with your general opinion about her.”

“Girlfriend privileges, Finn.” Rey grinned.

“Rey bats her eyelashes on Jakku once and has a Sith Lord eating out of her-”

“AHEM!” Leia cleared her throat loudly.

Rey laid back on her bed, staring at the ceiling. An order of Shore Leave was of little comfort while she was still on a ship that had seemed so roomy when it was just her, Aliana and 2V. But now that she had to share the space with a hundred and fifty more people it was absurdly cramped. Her quarters were about the only place she had room to walk around. Everyone kept telling her to rest,

but she couldn't. Not while there was still so much to do. So she missed a few days of sleep, what difference did it make? As long as she slept eventually she'd be fine.

Her gaze turned to her side. Aliana still laid there, comatose but stable. The rather abrupt transport from medbay to Fury and the lengthy trip through hyperspace didn't seem to worsen her condition at all, which was fortunate. The Porg was even nestled beside her, using a little crook in her elbow as a makeshift nest. Were it not for the medical equipment still attached to the Sith, it would have been absolutely adorable. As it stood, however, it was still pretty cute.

Rey shifted her weight to look at Aliana, sighing wistfully. *'I wish you were back'* she often thought to herself. *'This all would be so much easier with you here. You wouldn't tell me to go on shore leave.'* Her thoughts paused for a moment. *'Ok, maybe you would. And then I would get to see the look on your face when you realized that you and the General actually agreed on something.'* she inwardly amended with a smile.

Aliana's fingers twitched. The first time that had happened, Rey had let herself get hopeful she was waking up properly. But 2V had explained to her that despite popular beliefs, a coma wasn't a binary state of unconsciousness and that she would likely twitch, move, and sometimes even respond despite her sedatives still being administered regularly. Rey often wondered how much she could hear or how aware she was. Given the state she was in when her sedatives weren't being applied, she assumed the answer was "not much."

The sight of the Porg stirring and waking up caught her eye. His large eyes looked up at her adoringly and extended his wings out to her. She responded by extending a finger and scratching the critter atop his head where she knew he liked it, earning her a chirp of appreciation.

"Keeping her safe for me?" she asked with a smile. "That's good. I know she would thank you if she could."

The Porg trilled happily and tried to bite at Rey's finger. He nipped it affectionately before nestling back into Aliana's elbow. Rey's smile at the sight faltered when she noticed something glinting under Aliana's pillow. She reached out and pulled out a datapad with a document already loaded. She knew Aliana liked to read in bed, but the date on the document was at least a week before she was injured.

"What have you been reading," she whispered as she sat up and activated the datapad's backlight. On the screen she saw a scanned text detailing a Sith technique she'd never heard of.

One of the most mysterious uses of the Dark Side has been seen in only a small number of Sith throughout galactic history. Often used only in emergencies, this power allows a Sith Lord to hold their own corpse together with the Dark Side often long enough to acquire medical attention. This power can stop the body's decomposition and even hold off fatal wounds in many cases, so long as the Sith is constantly channeling their anger or passions. The most notable use of such a feat was the mysterious Sith Lord Sion, who held his own body together for years before finally falling at the hands of the Exile. Since Sion, many Sith have used this power only to delay death when medical attention is inaccessible. With enough focus, a Sith could withstand horrendous damage from a lightsaber and still remain living to destroy their enemies.

Rey's eyes widened as she read through the text, the pieces starting to place in her mind. Aliana was reading this not too long before their mission aboard the Supremacy. Was this technique it detailed what kept her alive when they escaped? Would she have died without it? The color on Rey's face drained slightly as she pondered on that possibility. To think of all it took to keep this

one woman to fall from the brink of death, and now it seemed that it took even more than Rey had thought. Rey thought she understood how dangerously close she was to losing the woman she loved, and yet the galaxy continuously surprised her with just how close it actually was.

'Thank the Force for Sion, I suppose,' she thought. Rey then moved to put the datapad down before hesitating. Aliana was reading these texts to prepare herself for a dangerous mission. It stood to reason there were more useful teachings filed away somewhere. With her mandated shore leave, Rey would certainly have enough time to read them all. She pulled the datapad back to her again and began perusing through the files.

She took notice of the titles Aliana had given every single document. It seemed that she had a very rigorous filing system for all the Jedi and Sith teachings stored in the Fury's databanks. The document she had been reading had been titled *'S-Sio-Resurg-1'*, indicating that there were more that hadn't been stored in the datapad. Several others were bundled together, but missing entries. From *'S-Tray-For-1'* to *'S-Tray-For-6'* but then skipping over files seven and eight and moving straight to nine.

"Hey, 2V?" she called out.

Within moments, the door opened and 2V stepped inside. "Do you need anything, Miss Rey?"

"Could you fill this datapad with the complete versions of the records Aliana was studying?" Rey asked, holding the datapad out to him.

"Certainly, Miss Rey. But I believe many of these records include holocrons from their respective Sith Lords. Shall I bring them to you as well?" 2V asked.

"Yes please," Rey said with a nod. "I appreciate it."

"I'm just doing my duties, Miss Rey," 2V said. "I'll be back momentarily with your desired records." With that, he turned and walked out the door to her quarters, shutting the door behind him which blocked the crowded ruckus just outside from reaching Rey's ears. She would have to remember to thank Aliana for making these quarters soundproof.

Rey sat back as she took stock of the triangular objects sitting on her desk. All of the Sith Holocrons had a strip of adhesive attached to their tips with a numeric code written on them, all of which corresponded to a list on her datapad detailing its contents. Some of them were even marked as *"conversible"* which the contents described as being able to communicate with the user.

Rey was curious about where to start. Each Sith Lord seemed to cover a different range of subjects, and all of them seemed useful. But one stood out to her among the list of holocrons.

Darth Traya - Malevolence of the Force - Conversible .

Something about that title caught Rey's attention above all the others. Many Sith Lords teachings talked about controlling the Force rather than it controlling them. Few Sith ever seemed to discuss the idea that the Force was, in fact, malevolent. Through Rey's experience, after everything with the Force Bond and Aliana being punished for standing in the way of that bond, it was a philosophy she was more than inclined to agree with.

She crossed her legs, assuming her meditative stance and extended her senses outward, focusing on the holocron. *'Alright, Traya,'* she thought. *'Let's see what you have to say.'*

The holocron opened for her almost effortlessly. She remembered Aliana saying something about Jedi holocrons needing to be opened with the Light. She wondered if Sith holocrons worked the same way. She felt simultaneously pleased and concerned at the implication of her mastery of the Dark Side. As the holocron came apart, the visage of a robed woman with a hood over her eyes stood at full height in her quarters. The holocron's age showed with how the image flickered, but she was imposing nonetheless.

"Have you come with questions?" the static-riddled voice of Darth Traya asked.

"I have," Rey answered, looking up at the visage. "I find myself at an impasse. It feels as though everyone, the Resistance I fight alongside, the Galaxy at large, even the Force itself, calls for me to become a Jedi and bring back the Light. And yet, the more I discover about myself, the more I feel that I am a Sith at heart. And yet when I begin to stray from the path set out for me, the Force itself seems to punish me. Even trying to take away the woman I love," Rey gestured to the comatose Aliana on the other side of the room. "If I try and walk the path I've been given, I'll be miserable, but if I try to resist, the Force will try and make me miserable anyway. I don't know what to do. How can I hold on to what little good I have left in this galaxy if the Force will try and take it from me?"

"Curious... tell me, child. What is the destiny the Force has in store for you? And why do you find it so distasteful?" Traya asked.

"The Force has decided to bond me with a Dark Jedi named Kylo Ren, the nephew of the Jedi Luke Skywalker, who turned to the Dark Side and destroyed his order. It feels as though I'm supposed to try and bring Kylo Ren back to the light, but the fact is, I hate him. I hate him for all the people he's killed and how miserable he set out to make me. He very nearly killed my lover and told me to let her die! And I'm supposed to look past all that and help him... heal!? I cannot do that. I just want to kill that bastard."

"The Force has set you on the path of healing, and yet all you want is revenge." Traya concluded. *"Know this, child. The Force has little regard for one life in the galaxy. The Force wilfully allows countless people to die in the name of balance. Do not believe for one second that it has not foreseen your actions. The Force is just as much the Dark as it is the Light. The Jedi believe the Dark Side to be a perversion of the Force. A creature created by the Sith. They are so very wrong."*

Rey let out a breath she didn't even realise she was holding. "I can certainly believe that," she said, "The few Jedi I know have taught me to fear the Dark Side, but Al- Darth Amorosa taught me just how ignorant they are." Her mind wracked with how next to phrase her words. Everything about Traya's presence, even that of an echo through a holocron, suggested she was someone with whom to consider her words carefully. "I understand that the Force will seek to reprimand me for resisting my path. I just need to know how I fight it. When it tried to take Amorosa away from me, it took powers far beyond my own to save her. I don't have that luxury anymore."

"And what is it about the Force that causes you to continue to rely on it, when it has so profoundly betrayed you?" Traya asked.

Rey blinked, rather caught off guard by the question. "I... I rely on the Force so that I may see the end of this war. So that I can someday live my life away from all this. It's my strength as a Force wielder that's gotten me this far... I think."

“That reliance is the poison the Force will use to destroy you,” Traya warned. “That dependence is a weakness. The Force is a tool like any other, but attachment to a tool is foolish. The promise of more power is what sends a Jedi or a Sith to their own destruction.”

Rey was silent for a moment. Traya’s words rang truer than she realized. Aliana herself was so tech illiterate because she had the Force as a crutch. Sith and Jedi alike had become so dependent on the Force that to be without it would be a fate worse than death. As Rey thought about the Force in this light, her mind drifted to Unkar Plutt, who would exploit her hard work for as little recompense as possible just because it suited him. The correlation put a bad taste in her mouth.

“Before I discovered the Force, I was a scavenger from nowhere,” Rey said softly. “Could I truly win this war as just that?”

“A scavenger should know better than anyone that there is value in what others may view as worthless scrap,” Traya explained.

“That’s... surprisingly encouraging,” Rey said, a hint of a smile on her face. “I believe I understand now.”

“Then take this to heart, child. Do not allow yourself to be in a position where the Force has leverage over you. The folly of Jedi and Sith alike is dependency. If you can give up the Force and still live, then the Force will have no more sway over you. The Force is but one of your many talents.”

“I will take that to heart, Darth Traya,” Rey said as she rose to her feet. “Thank you for your wisdom.”

Without a word, the image of the Sith flickered out and the holocron closed back into a tightly contained pyramid shape. Rey caught it in her hands before it fell to the floor and set it back onto the desk. Traya’s words sounded similar to what Aliana had said on Ahch To. That the Force was a tool to be used, not a way of life to be embraced. But for all those words, Aliana had grown to rely on the Force to compensate for all of her other shortcomings.

Her gaze turned back to Aliana, a resolute expression on her face. When Aliana recovered, Rey would help her heed the wisdom Traya had just given to her. The less they both relied on the Force, the better off they would be. It would be difficult, Rey had only just come to know how it felt to wield the Force but already she had grown so accustomed to it. Still, she could remember her life before it and she could live without relying on it again. It would be far harder for Aliana, but Rey would be there to help her.

She sat down on the edge of their bed and laid a hand over Aliana’s. She smiled at how warm it was, and how Aliana seemed to have shifted onto her side. She looked far more natural like this, almost like she was sleeping. Thinking back to what prompted this new batch of research, she suddenly felt a lot more anxious than she previously was over the fact that Aliana’s only contingency in the event of serious injury was the Force. That it was the only thing she had to draw on. Had Aliana truly never glanced at any other potential skills throughout her life? Tech was one thing, but she’d never seen her do anything that wasn’t cooking or lightsaber construction, now that she thought about it. She even used the Force to pilot her own ship.

Rey sighed. Teaching Aliana to rely on skills other than the Force would have to involve Aliana learning those skills. It would be an arduous task, especially when the stakes of the war were so high. Still, if she and Alie wanted to live to see the end of this war, it would be a necessity.

“I’ll help you,” Rey whispered, gently stroking Aliana’s arm. “I promise.”

“Sir?” came the voice of a crewman as he stepped into Hux’s quarters, “Sir, I have the results of the inquiry into the Sith and the Jedi.”

Hux turned away from the holoterminal, his expression stoic, but somewhat intrigued. “Yes?” he asked.

“We’ve collected our data from several sources to try and build as complete a profile as possible. It turns out we have more information on both of them than we realized,” the crewman explained, “Which one shall I start with, sir?”

“The Jedi,” Hux answered. “She is the most immediate concern in this matter.”

“The Jedi has been on Supreme Leader Snoke’s radar for quite some time,” the crewman explained. “His personal records indicate that he’s been watching her intently for at least the last five years. It wasn’t until the Sith showed up that he became distracted from her. His records aren’t clear, but it seems as if she and Supreme Leader Kylo Ren are connected in the Force in some way. As one of them grows in power, the other matches it. It’s likely why the Supreme Leader is so strong in the Force but so undisciplined, because the Jedi has only been growing exponentially more powerful the more she travels. She was abandoned on Jakku by her parents, who have no records from either us or the Empire. Aside from the Force, she’s basically a nobody.”

Hux rested his chin against a pointer finger and thumb as he processed the information. He knew about the Force Bond in broad strokes but none of the details. The more powerful she grew, the more powerful Kylo Ren grew. This presented a few options for them. Perhaps if the Dark Jedi could get a handle on his own petulant nature, he could become a power to be reckoned with. There was also the possibility of disposing him. If they managed to kill the Jedi or even cripple her somehow, Kylo’s power would logically wane as well. He would have even less authority than the little he had. A perfect ‘leader’ they could replace... or perhaps control.

“Understood,” he said. “And the Sith?”

“The Sith is actually a lot more detailed. It seems her family was on the radar of the Emperor.” The crewman swapped datapads and read out Amorosa’s profile. “She’s actually the granddaughter of Darth Alora, who ran afoul of Lord Vader shortly after the rise of the Empire. Alora’s daughter, Mayrik, was killed by Master Skywalker and Supreme Leader Kylo Ren a decade ago on Corellia. Strangely enough, none of these Sith are particularly strong in the Force. Both the Jedi and the Supreme Leader far outmatch Amorosa in raw power, but it seems she has them both outpaced in mastery. Amorosa herself was a mercenary before she joined the Resistance, and had many sightings throughout Hutt Space, usually with other women in tow.”

‘Of course she has’ Hux thought with utter disdain. Such a shame. Without that despicable trait of hers, he wouldn’t actually mind the idea of working with Amorosa. She was definitely a much more tolerable presence than Kylo Ren. “Does it say how her family managed to elude destruction by the empire if the Emperor was aware of them?” he asked.

“The Masters were careful not to speak the names of their apprentices around enemies,” the crewman explained. “According to Supreme Leader Ren’s records, Mayrik referred to Amorosa as ‘Star’ and not by her Sith name or birth name. Scant references are made about Wild Space, which is likely where they stayed for most of their time. Beyond that, Amorosa and Mayrik’s activities

placed them in the Outer Rim most of the time and the Emperor was usually too distracted with the machinations of Kestis, Tano, Marek and Skywalker to pursue them.”

‘*Wild Space*’ Hux thought. It would make sense that these Sith managed to elude the Empire’s grasp if that is where they stayed. Perhaps that is where the rest of the Resistance fled to. Unfortunately, with the bulk of their resources committed to fighting the Republic, they didn’t have the time or means to send out the number probes necessary for searching such a vast part of uncharted space.

“See if these... ‘*other women*’ cannot be contacted,” Hux ordered. “If they don’t have information to offer, perhaps they have skills that will be of use to us.”

“Pardon the insubordination, sir... but are you sure they’ll agree to work with us? Amorosa herself had a list of reasons for not allying with the First Order and our distaste for her... proclivities was among them. What makes you think these women will be more cooperative?” The crewman asked nervously.

“We don’t need them to agree,” Hux said plainly. “If their cooperation can be bought, then very well. But we are more than equipped to force them to comply.”

“With all due respect, sir... perhaps we would have better luck with both the Sith and the Jedi if we... loosened some of these restrictions?”

Hux fixed the crewman with a hard glare. “It is these ‘restrictions’ that ensure the First Order is composed only of the best possible specimen. These rules serve a purpose to keep the degenerates from infiltrating our ranks and for you to question them is out of line. If you value your position, or your tongue, you would best keep such thoughts to yourself.”

“I meant no disrespect, sir. Only that... the Sith has proven time and again to be the Supreme Leader’s better. Why do we have these restrictions if the result is Kylo Ren sitting on the throne?” he asked, knowing that approaching the subject from this angle would likely get him a more cordial response from Hux, who had openly displayed contempt for Kylo Ren.

Hux sneered at the Crewman, but no harsh words or commands of demotion followed. “Hmmm... I suppose I shall take your concerns under advisement,” he said in a low tone of voice. “Do not expect to be rewarded for skirting the line of insubordination. You are lucky that I do not remove you from your station. Now unless you have anything else to report about the Jedi or the Sith, you are dismissed.”

“My apologies, sir. I was only curious.” The crewman bowed. “And there is one last thing. When Amorosa contacted the Supremacy to surrender, we took her holo frequency. We can’t trace the ship through a holocall, but we do still have an open line of communication to the Sith and the Jedi.”

“Well, there is that at least,” Hux said. “That will serve its purpose when the time is right. Very well, you are dismissed,” he said curtly before turning his attention back to the holoterminal.

An open line of communication. It would be difficult to find a use for such a thing, but if he could... perhaps their ego could be pulled on for more information. A weakness. Kylo Ren had discovered their hiding place through their Force Bond, but Hux would have had to rely on more conventional methods. Thinking about all this Force nonsense was giving him a headache. He

preferred things that were more real. More tangible than this supposed energy that bound all things together, or whatever the Jedi say.

The Jedi and the Sith were tangible. Flesh and blood. Not abstract concepts. And anything that was flesh and blood could be killed.

It was then an idea struck him. He'd witnessed the duel in the throne room and how the Jedi had responded so viscerally when the Sith was struck down. He knew the Sith was still in critical condition, and so the Jedi would likely be on edge about her until she recovered. A nerve that could be pulled on, and was only made more raw by the relationship she had with the Sith.

Amorosa's wounds were grave. Even if she did fully recover, it would take quite a while. A perfect window of opportunity to take the Sith out of the equation for good and possibly draw the Jedi into a trap. With the Fury's holo frequency, they had an open line of communication when it came time to spring the trap. All they needed were specialists capable of fighting Force sensitives.

Hux stepped to another officer aboard the bridge. "Send a message to the criminal underworld," he began. "Alert them of a substantial reward for whoever brings us the Jedi and Sith."

"Understood, General," The officer said, turning to her terminal. "What should the qualifications include?"

"Mandalorian," he replied.

"That may be difficult, sir. Mandalorians are rare among the criminal underworld. And what few clans remain aren't friendly to the First Order," the officer warned him. "But I'll do my best. Anything else I should know?"

"I need them to be completely and totally *unscrupulous*," Hux said.

The officer caught the emphasis he put on 'unscrupulous' and her eyes widened. "...Understood, sir."

As the Fury dropped out of Hyperspace, the looming visage of a dreadnought filled the entire viewscreen. It was massive, and looked more like a Generation Ship than a vessel of war. Nevertheless it was armed to the teeth. The flagship of Niima the Hutt was outmatched only by the Supremacy in terms of size and firepower.

"How did Alie come to work for Niima?" Rey asked quietly as she, Leia, Amilyn and Ackbar all sat in the various seats on the bridge.

"I'm sure you can ask her that when she wakes up," Leia responded as she began to hail the flagship. "Let's just be thankful that her work gave us an in with them." Her attention became fixed on the holocom as their call was received. "Hello, this is General Leia Organa of the Resistance, requesting permission to dock aboard the Rayya," she said in an even tone.

A male Twi'lek appeared on the holoprojector, looking unamused with the intrusion. "What do you want, Resistance? Amorosa didn't say she was towing you around!"

"Darth Amorosa is currently indisposed at the moment," Leia explained vaguely. "She allowed us to call in one of her favors to refuel and restock on supplies. It would be greatly appreciated."

The Twi'lek scoffed and cut the holocall for a moment. They sat there in silence as the massive ship drifted outside. Rey still couldn't get a handle on things. Alie had never mentioned working for Niima the Hutt, not even in passing. She'd mentioned only a handful of the jobs she'd done the last decade, but the Hutt Cartel had never once come up in her stories. She couldn't help but feel a twinge of suspicion. An old feeling that she was certain she was past by now, but had roared back to life like an inferno.

Aliana had kept something from her.

Suddenly the holocall returned. "You are cleared for docking," the Twi'lek said with an unpleasant tone of voice. "Don't take too long."

"We won't. Thank you." Leia said with a polite smile before ending the call. The Fury came about to one of the many docking ports along the hull of the dreadnought. Everyone aboard could hear and feel it when the back of the corvette locked in place with the docking clamps.

"I'll step aboard to make sure everything goes smoothly," Amilyn said, rising from her seat and making her way to the airlock.

"I'm going too," Rey said, wanting desperately to get off the ship and stretch her legs. She couldn't shake the feeling of betrayal she felt when learning exactly which Hutt Aliana had worked for in the past.

Niima the Hutt had run Niima Outpost on Jakku. He was Unkar Plutt's boss, and the both of them had ownership over her for the longest time. She never knew exactly how she'd come to be in their service, only that her parents had abandoned her. She'd hoped for so long that they would return to find her, and she thought she'd finally moved past it when she found a new purpose in her life. But this was... this was too much. The idea of Aliana, the woman she loved more than her own life, having ever worked for the slug that had enslaved her was... she couldn't stand it. She felt disgusted just thinking about it, and she didn't know what to do about it now.

"I should remind you that you are still on shore leave, Rey," Amilyn said calmly yet firmly. "If you are going to spend any time on Niima's ship, it can't be in any official capacity. I can take care of that."

"I know," Rey said nodding in understanding. "I just need to be someplace with a little more leg room."

A beat passed before Amilyn smiled, satisfied with that reasoning. "Alright, come on," she said.

The ship was nothing like the Raddus. It was practically a skyborn city, with market districts and apartments lining an entire section. It was almost like Niima kept all the people in his employ on the ship instead of Nar Shaddaa. It made sense. Mobile operations could evade Republic and First Order alike. As Rey and Amilyn drifted down a market, Rey found her arm grabbed by a Duros who was skulking by an abandoned stand.

"Hey, girlie," he said, glancing around. "Rumor has it that the ship you came on is the Fury, right? Mayrik's ship?"

Rey's brow furrowed in confusion. While she consciously knew that the Fury was passed down Aliana's family for generations, it seemed odd to consider anyone would still refer to it as Mayrik's ship, especially after she's been gone for so long. "...What would that matter?" she asked.

“Word has it that Mayrik’s daughter’s been... incapacitated. And that she’s not swingin’ a lightsaber for a while, eh?” the Duros continued. “I know a lotta folks who’d pay top credits for ‘er alive. You got ‘er ship, wanna cut a deal?”

Confusion was soon replaced with a growing anger. Within the span of a thought, all of Rey’s curiosity about the situation and her feelings of betrayal that Aliana would work with Niima of all creatures was suddenly washed away by a wave of protective rage. Before she even realized it, her hand was already around the Duros’ throat.

“...Yeah, I’ll cut a deal,” Rey said in something between a whisper and a snarl. “The deal is you and your filth stay as far away from that ship as possible and in exchange I won’t kill any of you. How does that deal sound to you?”

“Hey lady, I was jus’ tryin’a-”

“Tiirro, are you bothering the Master’s guests again?” came a low voice from behind Rey.

She glanced back to see a red Twi’lek woman clad in thick, grey durasteel armor and a hooded cloak trailing off her shoulders. The way she walked indicated that she was some kind of bigshot on the ship, and Rey didn’t need the Force to see that she held authority here.

“N-no, L-Lord Talon! I-I was jus-”

“I dunno, it looks like you were bothering Lord Mayrik’s passengers,” she sneered. “You’ve been warned about that before.”

Tiirro backed away from Rey, his composure suddenly far more meek and skittish than before. “S-Sorry Lord Talon. I-It won’t happen again. Promise.”

“See that it doesn’t, or next time you lose your vocal chords,” Talon warned with a sharp glare. She watched as the Duros fled around the corner of the stand before she turned her attention to Rey. “Sorry about him. He’s always skulking around places he shouldn’t for his ‘big break’,” she said, her tone much lighter than before.

“I could tell.”

“What was he tryin’ a buy from ya anyway?” Talon asked curiously.

“Darth Amorosa,” Rey said matter-of-factly.

“Her apprentice? She’s here?” Talon raised an eyebrow. “Haven’t seen her in years.”

Rey’s puzzled expression returned to her face. “...How many years exactly?”

“Can’t quite remember. Maybe like six?” The Twi’lek shrugged as she tried to recall. “Can’t really remember. Said something about Mayrik being on a Wild Space planet or something.”

Rey’s brow furrowed as the number of years didn’t match up. Did Aliana lie about her mother’s death?

“Well word is she’s doing a lot worse than biting now,” Talon remarked. “Cartel’s been hearing that one of the best mercs in the business is making life hell for the First Order for seemingly no charge. No one can make sense of it.”

“Really? Why’s that? Seems like a noble cause to fight for,” Rey asked. She opted to keep her knowledge of Aliana’s real motivations, Rey herself, secret for the time being.

“That’s the thing. I don’t know how well you know the kid, or her family, but Sith aren’t really known to be noble,” Talon explained. “I mean Mayrik herself was more decent than half the dreg that Niima keeps aboard this place, but she wasn’t afraid to get her hands dirty. Just wasn’t willing to do it for free.”

“What kind of work did she take for the right price?” Rey asked.

“For the right price, Mayrik would wipe out Niima’s competition,” Talon explained. “Pretty sure it was an attrition thing. She hated the Hutts. I think she did a running job once, but after that one she cut ties with Niima completely.”

Rey’s eyes widened. Running? Slave running? Darth Mayrik was involved in this? Was Rey that one? Her being sold happened so long ago she couldn’t remember. She began to tremble as these questions grew louder and louder in her mind. The colour drained from her face and a new feeling of disgust washed over her. She had to force herself to keep calm. It was alright, Aliana wore a ton of masks. Perhaps Mayrik did too and Talon just believed what Mayrik wanted her to believe...

“Hey!” came Talon’s voice, cutting through the loud thoughts and snapping Rey back to attention. “You ok? You’re a bit pale,” she noted. “Tell you what? Your ship’s probably gonna be here awhile. One of Niima’s handlers is probably gonna try and haggle you guys over the price for your supplies. What say I buy you a drink? You look like you could use it.”

“Sure...” Rey said, barely paying attention as Talon led her to a nearby cantina.

A thousand thoughts were going through her head. The odds of Aliana’s mother having been the one to deliver her to Jakku were slim, and the odds of Aliana even knowing about it were even more slim. But she couldn’t shake the thought from her head. If Aliana knew and didn’t tell her... that was worse than not telling her she was a Sith Lord. Rey didn’t think she could ever trust her again. If she didn’t know... she’d have to break that news to her. Shatter her perception of her mother as a loving and caring soul.

Did she have it in her to do that?

She snapped back to reality when a Juri juice was slid into her hand and the sound of Bith music slammed into her eardrums. “Hey, have something to drink. It’ll do you some good.” Talon said.

“R-Right,” Rey said with a nod before grabbing the glass. Bringing it to her lips, she took a single slow sip. It was sweet, but certainly had a kick to it. She shuddered slightly as she placed the glass back down. “Mmm, not bad,” she said.

“It ain’t the good stuff Niima keeps locked away, but it does the job,” Talon said before taking a swig from her own mug. “So what’s your story, hon? How’d you and the kid get roped together?”

“...She was tailed by the First Order on Jakku, and I was seen with her. So she took me off the planet with her and has been my friend ever since,” Rey explained, deciding to give Talon the truth. “Now, she’s my lover.”

“Huh. I kinda figured that little Sith would be into girls,” Talon said with a smile. “Even as a kid, she couldn’t take her eyes off Niima’s dancers.” The Twi’lek’s eyes soon fell upon Rey’s belt as she

caught the sight of her lightsaber in her periphery. "I take it, that's not just for show?" she asked.

"No," Rey shook her head. "I'm a... Jedi." She didn't feel confident in her own self-declaration. She still wasn't even sure if it fit her anymore.

"Really?" Talon asked, not appearing convinced. "A Sith and a Jedi falling in love? Sounds like a cheesy romance holo if I ever heard one." She leaned back in her seat, pulling the hem of her cloak aside to reveal a silver lightsaber hilt clipped to her own belt. "I used to be Sith. Probably still am, but now I'm just doin' what I can to get by."

Rey had expected it. She could feel Talon's strength in the Force. She wasn't as strong as Aliana, but she sent ripples through the Force that were no less noticeable. "That's sort of what I'm doing right now, with my Master dead. Amorosa even made me a..." her voice trailed off as she reached for the back of her belt where her Sith lightsaber was kept, only to realize it was no longer there.

Talon arched a brow as Rey fell silent. "Made you a what?" she asked. "What's with the dramatic pause? Is this a Jedi thing?"

Rey shot up from her seat, looking over herself. She couldn't find the other lightsaber anywhere on her person. In fact, she couldn't remember having that lightsaber on her person since...

Crait.

"...Kriff!" she cursed.

"What is it?" Talon asked.

Rey slumped back into her seat and stared down at her drink. "Amorosa made me a Sith lightsaber as a gift. And I lost it."

Talon winced before taking another swig of her drink. "Yikes. Hope she doesn't get too pissed about that."

"Me neither," Rey groaned. Her anger, or rather *potential anger*, toward Aliana had been all but forgotten as she only thought about how disappointed she might be if she found out Rey had lost the lightsaber she'd spent so long making for her. She kicked herself and rubbed her temples. The General and Poe had been right. She did desperately need to take a break for her mental health. Now she was losing gifts from the woman she loved like they were trash.

Talon watched as Rey continued to sulk. "Eh, don't beat yourself up, hon," she said. "I'm sure one misplaced gift won't ruin whatever romance holo thing you two got going right now. ...I mean, I assume," she shrugged, "Can't say I know very well what the kid is like these days."

At that point, a zabrak walked up to their table, turning to address Talon. "Hey, Talon. This one of the ones from Mayrik's ship?" he asked

"Guntha, I know you are not actually trying to waste my time with your stupidity while I'm off duty," she responded, glaring daggers at the zabrak.

"Boss' asking questions," he replied. "Wants to know why Amorosa is too 'indisposed' to talk to him."

"She's in a coma," Rey said, taking another sip of her drink.

Talon blinked at Rey before rubbing her eyes with her pointer finger and thumb. “Oh for kriff’s sake,” she groaned.

“Really?” The Zabrak asked, a wicked smile forming on his face. “The boss will be very interested to hear that.”

“And why, pray tell, is that?” Rey asked, glaring up at the Zabrak.

“The Sith hasn’t been making many friends around here, if you catch my drift,” Guntha explained. “Her jack of all trades routine is putting a lot of good smugglers and mercs out of a job. Plus the boss ain’t too pleased that she’s not been doin’ jobs for him since Mayrik kicked the bucket. Word is the bounty on her head is worth more than her services and there are more than a few people who want some of that action.”

“Well, it looks like a bad day for everyone involved,” Rey said calmly. “Because nobody’s getting anywhere near her.”

“Ohoho, I don’t know about tha-” Guntha managed to say before Talon rose to her feet and sent her armor clad fist fast and hard in his throat. The zabrak fell to his knees coughing and wheezing.

“Don’t get too big for your horns, Guntha,” Talon warned, looking down on him with disdain. “None of you mangy banthas are picking a fight with the Jedi here. It’s bad for business. Now crawl back under your rock.”

Guntha said nothing and instead scrambled to his feet and ran off. Rey glared at him as he left.

“Fool,” she spat. “If he thinks I’m letting any filthy Hutt scum near her while she’s recovering, he’s not going to live very long.”

“I’d watch who you’re calling a fool,” Talon said, returning to her seat and giving Rey an unamused look. “A general rule of thumb is that when you know people want your loved ones dead, you don’t admit to them being in a coma to a ship full of people who want her dead. I mean, I was giving you the benefit of the doubt with the whole losing the lightsaber business, but now I’m starting to think you’re a few cruisers short of a fleet.”

“Two weeks ago, I murdered the Supreme Leader of the First Order,” Rey scoffed. “I think I can handle some dirty pirates.”

Talon’s gaze remained fixed on Rey as she read her face. “...Either you got one hell of a sabacc face or you’re not making that up,” she said after a moment of quiet. “You’re not one of those knowledge and inner peace kinda Jedi, I can see that much.”

“I’m the kind of Jedi that the Dark Lady of the Sith would fall in love with,” Rey smirked. “I’ve seen Niima’s operations before, I’m not afraid of his filth.”

Talon chuckled. “I like you,” she said. “You’re reckless as all hell, but I can see you’ve got what it takes to back that up.”

“Mmhmm,” Rey nodded. “I’ve trained hard for months with a Jedi Master and Amorosa. I’m becoming more powerful every day, and I’ll use that power to keep her safe from anything that threatens her.”

“Duly noted,” Talon said before finishing her drink. “Let me know next time you’re around Nar Shaddaa. I’ve been meaning to find a new sparring partner and the competition around here’s been pretty stale.”

“It’s a deal.”

Chapter End Notes

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More Cold Blooded Than Darth Vader

A simple refuel and resupply shouldn't have been something that would run into seventeen different roadblocks, but here in the Outer Rim nearly everything had a catch. And then the catch had a catch. Despite the Fury being the same ship Aliana had always flown, the fact that there were more people on the ship than usual seemed to bother the Hutt.

Amilyn was at her breaking point with one of Niima's many representatives. "It's just fuel and supplies. I don't understand what your issue is?"

"Look lady, Niima might owe the Sith a favor, but not the Resistance," the Duros sneered. "And Niima's not too happy with the Sith as it is, so he's not feelin' too generous. Ya catch my meanin'?"

"Well if Niima is really the one who is objecting to this, then he would have said as much before allowing us to dock now wouldn't he?" Amilyn asked, unamused by the representatives' objections. "If you can get the Hutt himself to tell me this and prove that you aren't just trying to haggle something out of us, then I might be more open to believe you."

"Well calling me a liar certainly ain't gonna win you any points with the boss, Lady," the Duros warned. "You want the boss? You bring out the Sith. Prove to us that you didn't just off her and steal her ship, and maybe we can be more accommodating."

Amilyn's mouth formed a thin line. She knew it was a bad idea to tell one of Niima's men that Aliana was currently comatose. If Niima himself was as upset with Aliana as this Duros was suggesting to her, admitting to him that she was so vulnerable would have just caused more problems.

"Lord Amorosa is occupied at the moment," Amilyn lied. "Is there nobody who you would accept speaking on her behalf?"

The Duros stroked his chin as he pondered. "Well word is that you're also travelling with a Jedi. Hardly seems feasible considering Jedi and Sith are like oil and water. But if it's true, then perhaps Niima will be willing to speak with her."

Amilyn winced. This wasn't much better. While Rey wouldn't explain in detail, she clearly had issues with Niima that made her unwilling to cooperate. Combined with the fact that she was still on-edge and exhausted from the Supremacy and Crait meant that she still needed rest. She didn't want to continue asking her to settle every problem the Resistance had. On the other hand, the quicker they settled this, the quicker they could get off the ship.

"Very well, I'll see what I can do," Amilyn sighed as she pulled out her holocom. "Holdo to Rey? Come in, Rey."

"Rey here," the Jedi responded. "Everything alright, Admiral?"

"Unfortunately no. Niima won't deal with us, and wants to speak to Aliana," Amilyn explained. "He'll only accept you as a liaison to prove that we didn't just steal the ship."

There was a long pause of dead air before any response came. "I'm on my way," Rey said before ending the transmission.

“Well she sounds like a pretty little thing,” the Duros noted sleazily. “I guess Amorosa still has her tastes.”

“Be careful. She’s highly volatile,” Amilyn warned him.

There was an extended silence between the two before the sound of footsteps echoed down the hall from the Duros’ office. The door opened and Rey walked inside, escorted by Talon behind her.

“Lord Talon, still mingling I see?” the Duros smirked.

“Cut the crap, Skiiva,” Talon snarled.

Rey glanced from Skiiva to Talon before settling her eyes back on the Duros. “Alright, I’m here. What do you want?”

“Well, Miss Snippy,” Skiiva remarked. “The long and short of it is, you people are getting more than Niima owes from this favor. So, you gotta cough up something else if you want to leave. Simple as that.”

“If we had any resources to spare, we wouldn’t be calling in this favor,” Rey said plainly. “If Niima wants something more, we don’t have it.”

“Well, Niima’s always looking for more workers,” Skiiva said, his tone not matching the gravity of what he was implying. “If you have any one on that ship you don’t need, we’ll be more than happy to take them off your hands and put them to wo-”

“No,” Rey said firmly.

“Excuse me?” Skiiva asked, his brow raising.

“No. You’re not getting any of our people. Niima already presumed to try to buy me from my parents, he’s not getting anybody else,” Rey glared down at Skiiva with malice in her eyes.

Amilyn’s eyes widened with shock. Talon’s expression was unreadable as she simply stood there, arms crossed and watching all of this unfold.

The Duros blinked in confusion. “Uh- I’m sorry did you say that Niima s-”

“Before I was a Jedi, I was a slave on Niima outpost,” Rey interrupted. “I am not about to enter the business of giving that slug any more slaves. Period.”

Skiiva was silent for a moment before scoffing. “Well, you certainly sound like Amorosa right now,” he groaned. “In that case, I can’t help you. Either give us credits or we take your ship.”

Rey’s eyebrow raised. “What do you mean I sound like Amorosa?” she asked.

“She wouldn’t do slave runs for Niima either,” Skiiva shrugged. “He tried to get her to take those running jobs like Darth Mayrik used to do, but she didn’t bite. Never knew a Sith to have a conscience before.”

“The fact that I don’t beat you within an inch of your life every day is evidence of my conscience, Skiiva,” Talon remarked with a sneer.

“So why does Niima owe Amorosa a favor?” Rey asked. “How did a Hutt come to owe a debt to a Sith Lord?”

“I think it was something back from when Mayrik still did work for him,” Skiiva explained. “She wanted to make sure her debt carried over to Amorosa if she never cashed it in.” The Duros brow furrowed at Rey suddenly. “You know, I’m surprised you didn’t know this already. Don’t you work with Amorosa?”

“I don’t just work with Amorosa. I *am* with Amorosa,” Rey corrected him. “And that doesn’t mean I know everything about her.”

“Ooohh, is that right?” Skiiva asked skeevily. “So the Jedi and Sith have finally put aside their differences for a little-”

“Stay professional, Skiiva,” Talon warned.

“Fine fine,” Skiiva scoffed. “Look, you may very well be married to Amorosa for all I care. Still doesn’t change our position on this.”

“And what *would* change your position? Besides betraying my people?” Rey asked, sitting down in front of the Duros.

“Either credits or something else of value,” Skiiva said dismissively. “Your dear Admiral here tells me you’re short on either one, so unless you can conjure up a miracle with those fancy Jedi powers of yours, I guess you’re out of luck.”

“And what counts as being of value to a Hutt?” Rey asked curiously, fishing for more information to work with. “What does Niima want?”

“Profits and anything that’ll help expand his profits,” Skiiva elaborated. “Free labor, weapons for his enforcers, intel on good business opportunities. That kinda thing. You got any good intel that Niima might want?”

“I have intel on the First Order, and how they’re tracking ships through Hyperspace. If that qualifies,” Rey said, casually inspecting her fingernails.

The Duros blinked in surprise. “They... they can do that?” he asked.

“They’ve been tracking us for quite some time,” Amilyn said. “We managed to shake them, but it wasn’t easy.”

“And they can track *any* ship?” Skiiva asked.

“Indeed. They could track Niima’s flagship, or any of his freighters. Within a few days, Niima could find himself slave to the First Order,” Rey drawled, glancing up from her hand with a smirk. “And without me telling you exactly how they do it, you’re as good as trapped.”

Skiive hardened his somewhat uneasy expression, appearing almost disbelieving in Rey’s claims. “Alright, if I’m to believe that the First Order has this kinda tech, why should the boss have to worry about it?”

“Because you know exactly how the First Order feels about non human races,” Holdo said. “Sooner or later, they will try to bring Niima and his operation to heel. And if you don’t know how to avoid

their hyperspace tracking, they will succeed.”

Skiiva opened his mouth to speak when his own holocom buzzed. He pressed the earpiece on his head and turned away from Rey and Holdo. “Yes? ...Oh Lord Niima! ...yes? ...I see... Very well, your Majesty, I’ll deal with it...” he pressed his earpiece and turned back around, a much wider smirk on his face.

“Seems like you’ve been lyin’ about the Sith to little old me,” Skiiva snickered. “Y’know, I was almost startin’ to believe you about the First Order, but you’ve just been hidin’ the fact that Amorosa’s down for the count.”

Rey managed not to let her expression show any worry or panic as she kept her gaze fixed on Skiiva. “You don’t know what you’re talking about,” she said in a low tone of voice.

“You said it yourself to Tiir. Amorosa’s in a coma on her ship,” Skiiva smirked. “Weak and ripe for the taking.”

“Told you it was a bad idea to say that out loud,” Talon said to Rey.

“Wait. You knew?” Skiiva asked. “And you didn’t think to say anything?”

“I’m off the clock,” Talon said plainly. “Get Niima to talk about hazard pay and maybe then I’ll start informing him of stuff outside business hours.”

Skiiva glared at Talon, silently cursing Niima’s habit of hiring vagrant Sith. “Regardless, the price has just been changed. Niima wants the Sith.”

“Niima’s not getting the Sith,” Rey said, rising from her seat and leaning over to glare at Skiiva intensely. “No one on this ship is getting the Sith without getting through me first.”

“Sorry, let me explain to you how this goes,” Skiiva smirked, unaffected by Rey’s outburst. “Either you give Niima the Sith, or Niima will *take* the Sith and kill the rest of you for good measure. Amorosa’s been a little too independent for her own good.”

“I can’t say I agree with anyone who says the phrase ‘Too independent’,” Holdo said in a stern tone of voice. “Amorosa is working with the Resistance and as such has our full support. A threat against her is a threat against all of us.”

“You heard our terms,” Skiiva shrugged. “Guess it’s up to you if one little Sith is worth it. Out of my office.”

Rey sneered at the Duros before turning and walking out the door without another word. Holdo followed after her with Talon trailing behind.

“That kriffing slug,” Rey cursed under her breath. “I may as well just cut my way through this place and put an end to his miserable existence.”

“I wouldn’t blame you,” Holdo shook her head. “The way that filth spoke about you when I cut the transmission makes me very worried for what would happen to Aliana if the Hutt got his hands on her.”

“He’s not going to,” Rey said matter of factly. “I’ll kill every scumbag on this ship before I let that happen... No offense,” she said to Talon.

“None taken,” the Twi’lek shrugged. “I just suggest that whatever you do, you do it before 0600. That’s when I’m back on duty and I am not gonna be in the mood to fight to the death.”

“Understood. We can refuel somewhere else,” Rey shook her head. “I don’t care what anyone else on the ship thinks. While Aliana’s out, the Fury belongs to me and so I’m giving the orders until we land. Admiral, prep the ship for launch. And put everyone on high alert.”

“Alright,” Amilyn said, pulling out her holocom. “You’re supposed to be on shore leave, but given the circumstances, I’m not going to be picky. ...Yes, 2V? Please prep the Fury for launch. We’ll be unable to refuel here.”

“Most unfortunate, Admiral,” 2V replied solemnly. “Luckily, there will be plenty of stars we can use to refuel between here and Odessen. And we should be able to keep everyone fed until then if we recalculate the rations.”

“Understood, thank you,” Holdo said with a grateful smile.

Rey waved Amilyn off and turn to Talon. “I need your help. There’s a lot about myself and Alie that I don’t know. Can you get me the records of Niima’s dealings with Mayrik and Amorosa? As well as the records of his dealings involving me? I need to know what happened to me, and I’m tired of living in the dark.”

Talon blinked. “...Uuuuhh, okay. The stuff with Mayrik and Amorosa shouldn’t be a problem, but Niima has bought a LOT of children over the years. Do you have, like, a timeframe we can work with? How old were you?”

“I was five when I was left on Jakku. According to Unkar Plutt, I was born in 15 ABY. Is that good enough?” Rey asked.

“Yeah that should narrow it down,” Talon said with a nod. “Still that’s gonna be a lot of data to sift through. Come on, the sooner we get to it the better,” she said, ushering Rey to follow her as she went down the corridor.

Rey followed after Talon, her mind buzzing with possibilities. They had to get off the ship soon before Aliana was put in any more danger... but she couldn’t let an opportunity like this pass her by. She couldn’t live in ignorance any more. She had to know what happened to her.

Talon was sifting through the mainframe while Rey kept watch for any of Niima’s goons. It had been an hour and while Talon had found everything with Mayrik and Amorosa, almost nothing had turned up on Rey.

“All slaves are categorized by an ID number based on a transmitter placed inside their body somewhere,” Talon explained as she sifted through records on the people Niima had bought. “I don’t suppose you know yours?”

Rey blinked. She had no memory of having any ID number. The most anyone called her on Jakku was ‘girl’ or ‘scavenger’. But she did remember something from when she first came to that planet. An intense itching in her arm that made her scratch it bloody multiple times trying to make it go away. The fact that she wore bandaging around her arms for the longest time was partially to keep herself from scratching. The Jedi quickly unfurled the bindings around her left arm, exposing a

worn out mark on her forearm. Probing with her fingertips, she felt something beneath her skin that didn't feel right. Unnatural.

"I think I found the transmitter," Rey said looking up from her arm. "Does that help?"

"Yeah, bring your arm over to the scanner," Talon said, not looking up.

Rey obliged and brought her arm to the scanner. A few lights blinked and then an ID number appeared on screen. It was too long to read in the brief period that Rey could see it, but the display then gave way to a list of holos, text records and other assorted files.

"Wow, Niima sure liked to keep tabs on you," Talon whistled. She opened to one of the most recent files and examined it. A holo appeared of Skiiva doing what appeared to be note taking.

"The Force Sensitive girl on Jakku has escaped in the First Order assault," he read out to the implied recording droid. "His Majesty is displeased, and the deal with Supreme Leader Snoke has fallen through as a result. Without the girl, Snoke will no longer pay. The First Order's interest in the girl is unknown, but our spies have recently learned that a Sith Lord has destroyed his apprentice's reputation. Maybe he's searching for another one? There was something we heard about a connection. Probably more Jedi drivel. Niima's given orders to find the girl immediately. We'll be putting dozens of bounty hunters on the case."

"Huh," Talon said, tilting her head. "Guess the First Order's been watching you for awhile."

Rey shuddered as the thought of Snoke having her under watch for who knows how long filled her with nausea. "I'm glad I killed him," she remarked. "So is this everything?"

"Yeah, just have to wait for the data to carry over to the datapad and you'll be set," Talon said. "There's a lot though so it's gonna take awhile getting through all of it."

"Thanks, Talon. I appreciate it," Rey nodded.

"Well you could show your appreciation by answering some questions for me," Talon smiled. "What's this connection they mentioned? Do you know?"

Rey grimaced at the question. "Yes, but I don't really like to talk about it," she said, frowning when Talon arched a brow at her, wordlessly asking her to elaborate. "...For some reason or another, I developed a Force bond with Kylo Ren. I don't know how or why. I just know that I hate it. Aliana was actually kind enough to shield my mind away from his."

"Force Bond? That thing Jedi develop with their apprentices and spouses?" Talon cocked an eyebrow.

"I assure you, I am neither of those things in relation to Kylo Ren," Rey said, appearing as if she were on the verge of vomiting. "The Force seems to think I should bring him back to the Light and is pushing me in that direction. I very much disagree with its opinion."

"You disagree with the opinion of the Force?" Talon asked incredulously.

"Not very Jedi-like I know," Rey shrugged.

"And here I thought Jedi treated Force Bonds like the second coming of sliced polystarch," Talon whistled.

“The Jedi are going to have to cut out that fanaticism when I’m in charge,” Rey said, her fingers drumming against the terminal impatiently.

“You know what? I like you.” Talon smirked. “Not many women would have the nerve to defy destiny like that. You got a good head on your shoulders.”

“Thank you,” Rey said with a smile. “I like my head and like to keep sniveling Dark Jedi out of it. And, for what it’s worth, I like you too. I just don’t understand how someone like you ends up working for Niima the Hutt.”

“Got bills to pay and the money’s good,” Talon explained. “Niima’s one of the worst gangsters left in Hutt space, but he pays well. Especially if you have a lightsaber.”

Rey dwelled on that thought. A gangster that had Force Sensitives in his pocket seemed especially dangerous. Like a threat that she felt compelled to deal with sooner rather than later. Objectively, she understood the First Order took priority. Still, she couldn’t help but imagine how much better that Galaxy would be without Niima in it.

“Well, then remind me to come back to this place with a better deal for you,” Rey said casually.

“Will do,” Talon chuckled, “Though honestly, if Amorosa came back with an offer to help rebuild the Sith Empire, I’d be there in an instant.”

Rey blinked. It seemed that Talon wasn’t just a Force Sensitive bruiser for Niima, but in fact someone who subscribed to Sith philosophy. “Oh, so I take it your full name is Darth Talon then?” she mused.

“Lord Talon,” Talon corrected her. “And Sith titles aren’t names. Only one Darth left in the galaxy, and that’s Amorosa. When she calls herself the Dark Lady of the Sith, she’s earned that right.”

“That she has,” Rey said, a fond smile crossing her face. She was fairly sure she could talk Talon’s ear off about how amazing Aliana was if this were the time or place to do it. “So what made you want to become Sith anyway?”

“Mayrik and her daughter,” Talon explained. “I was a kid in the criminal underworld, Mayrik stumbled onto me and sensed that I was strong in the Force. She offered to train me to defend myself, and over a couple of months she and her daughter gave me basic training in the Force and lightsaber combat. I didn’t see either of them until a few years later when Amorosa showed up and made a spectacle out of Niima.”

“A spectacle?” Rey asked, tilting her head slightly. “You mean when she refused to do the running jobs for him?”

“Yup,” Talon nodded. “Amorosa didn’t take kindly to Niima’s suggestion. Not sure why she was so adamant against it when her mother took them without complaint.”

Rey didn’t respond to Talon right away. She simply focused on the warm feeling of relief that blossomed in her chest. Regardless of what her mother did and why, Aliana didn’t resort to the same kind of things she did. She could take solace in that at least. “...Well she has always been something of a softie,” Rey said in good humor.

Talon raised an eyebrow at this and looked at Rey incredulously. “Amorosa? A softie? Are you sure about that? The woman’s more cold-blooded than Darth Vader.”

“Was Vader ever a little spoon?” Rey asked with a knowing smirk.

Talon practically choked on her own breath, “You’ve got to be pulling my leg here. Amorosa’s always been the most ruthless woman to have ever come onto this ship. She once cut the arms off a rodian for leering at her.”

“Oh I don’t doubt that. The Aliana I know would still do something like that. But she’s more than just a ruthless Sith. It’s just that no one else gets to really see that side of her. But I have.” Rey couldn’t help but beam with pride slightly before her expression grew more somber. “She’s actually... she’s incapacitated because of me. She risked her own life to save mine.”

Talon’s eyes widened at this. She’d never known Amorosa to be that selfless. “Either you’re pulling a really inept con... or she was. I’ve never known her to risk her life for *anyone* .”

Rey shrugged. “First time for everything, I suppose.” Rey said. “The point is, that Aliana is important to me and I’m not letting anyone on this ship lay a finger on her. Whether or not you believe me doesn’t really matter.”

“No, I believe you, it’s just... this is a lot to take in,” Talon explained. “I’d always thought of Amorosa as an amoral, cruel Lord of the Sith. Hearing that all of it may as well have been an act is just... hard to accept, ya know?”

“Trust me, I know all about Aliana surprising people,” Rey said with an understanding smirk. Her attention turned back to the terminal “So is all this data ready for transfer?”

“Almost. Niima’s computers are old and slow,” Talon nodded as she tapped a few more buttons before extracting the datapad and handing it to her. “Here. I don’t know what it is you’re looking for, but I hope this will help.”

“I’m sure it will. Thank you, Talon,” Rey said gratefully, accepting the datapad. “I’m honestly not sure how I meet such helpful and accomodating Sith, but I’m not going to question it.” She fastened the pad onto her sash before stepping out to peer beyond the door. “Doesn’t look like we’ve attracted any attention either.”

“Niima doesn’t have a lot of staff on the computers most of the time,” Talon explained as she glanced back toward the computers. “They’re unattended, and password-locked. Luckily I have clearance. So long as nobody looks at the access logs, I’ll be fine.”

“Good,” Rey replied. “I would hate to see Niima punish you for this. I don’t know what kind of reprimands a Hutt employs, but I can’t imagine they’re good.”

The Jedi turned her attention to her commlink, opening a channel to the Admiral. “Amilyn are we ready to go?”

“Yes. Ship’s prepared for takeoff. Just waiting on you,” Holdo confirmed through the comm.

“On my way,” Rey nodded before cutting the call.

“Hey, hold on.” Talon reached out and took Rey’s holocom and keyed a few numbers into it before handing it back. “This is my personal holo frequency. If Amorosa wakes up and needs more Sith, give me a call. I’ll be there at her word.”

Rey took the holocom back and smiled warmly at Talon. “You got it. I would be honored to have you on our side, Talon.” She said. “I have to get back to the ship before Niima has any more smart ideas about stopping us. ...I’m glad to have met you.”

“I’m glad to have met you too,” Talon smiled. “It’s not often I get to meet a Jedi with a lick of sense.”

“Like I said. First time for everything,” Rey said with a cheeky grin before briskly making her way down the corridor.

“Ah, the famed Hunter,” Hux smirked as the visage of an armored Mandalorian appeared on the holoprojectors. “I must say, you’re a lot shorter than I expected.”

“Funny,” The Mandalorian remarked dryly. Even with their helmet on, they made it clear they were not amused by Hux’s banter. “Message didn’t give details about the job. What’s the First Order outsourcing for?”

“We are on the hunt for two powerful Force Users,” Hux explained. “A Sith Lord and a Jedi Knight. Both of them have proven... problematic for the Supreme Leader.”

“Jedi and Sith?” The Mandalorian asked, visibly intrigued. “That’s some pretty rare game these days. Don’t you have people for this sort of thing?”

“Our people have proven... inadequate.” Hux said stiffly.

A small huff of laughter came from the holo. “Wow, bet it stings to say that,” he said, his smile somehow showing through his traditional Mando Helm. “Alright, so what’s the deal? You want me to kill ‘em? Bring ‘em in alive?”

“Quite the opposite, actually,” Hux explained. “The Jedi and Sith are the only things standing in the way of us and completely destroying the Resistance. I only want them lured away while we destroy their allies. Of course, as you tail them I will also require the location of where they decide to set up a new base. That is the job, Hunter. Track the Jedi and Sith down, lure them away, give me the location of their base, and keep them occupied while we destroy their friends.”

“That doesn’t sound too difficult,” the Mandalorian remarked. “What’s the catch?”

“The catch is that the Jedi and Sith are extremely deadly. The two of them murdered our previous Supreme Leader,” Hux explained. “The Jedi in particular is so powerful, we witnessed her crush siege vehicles like they were made of starch.”

The Mando took a moment to mull over the information before he spoke again. “Alright, General. Give me all the data you got on these sorcerers, and half the money up front, and you got a deal.”

Getting away from Niima’s ship proved more difficult than initially expected. As soon as the Fury released its docking clamps, they were hit with a barrage of turret fire that Rey only barely

managed to glance with a few clever turns. As they weaved around the ship's lasers waiting for the Hyperdrive to prime, the holoterminal started beeping like crazy.

"Blast this damn Hutt!" Rey growled, getting up from the pilot's seat. "Poe take the controls!"

"Aye Aye!" Poe said, jumping to the pilot's seat. He made his control of the Fury well known to everyone on board with a hard veer to port, nearly sending everyone tumbling over.

Rey bit back a curse as she made her way to the holoterminal, pressing a button to open a channel and stop that infernal beeping.

"What!?" she asked harshly and blindly to the unknown contact.

The image of Niima the Hutt and a translator droid appeared before her, Leia and Amilyn. Finn and Rose came running the moment they saw the slug as well. Rey glared at him with malice in her eyes.

"The almighty Niima demands that you turn your ship around and return," the droid said, translating Niima's inane babble. "He will not allow one of his slaves to escape again, nor the rogue who has interfered with his business."

Rey narrowed her gaze at the droid. After all these years, after all Rey had made of herself. Niima still saw her as his property. "Well then," she said, her voice low and sinister. "Allow me to offer this to your master as a rebuttal."

Rey extended her senses outward. She searched for the droid that was communing with her. It's visage offered a good visual key to focus onto. When she found it, she applied pressure through the force. Suddenly the droid over the holo contorted into itself. Sparks and pieces of metal flew off it's imploding being. Soon the droid was nothing more than a condensed ball of scrap that landed on the floor with a hard thunk before the transmission ended.

"If he tries to radio the ship again, let me know," Rey snarled. "I'll end that slug's miserable life in an instant."

"Of course, Miss Rey," 2V replied cheerfully. "You are as just as you are ruthless."

Leia glanced at Rey, a genuinely worried expression on her face that was shared by both Finn and Rose. Her two friends glanced at each other and seemed to be communicating without speaking. Their nervousness was not lost on Rey, but she found herself caring less and less what the others thought of her methods. She stormed back to the cockpit and sat down in the co-pilot's seat next to Poe.

"I'm gonna get it from Leia when we get to Odessen," Rey huffed. "Why did we even come here in the first place?!"

"We thought we could mooch off Aliana's collected favors, if I'm remembering correctly," Poe replied before spinning the Fury away from another volley of turbo lasers. "You think she'll be upset that we burned one of her contacts while she was out?"

"According to people on the ship, Aliana already burned her bridges with Niima a long time ago, she just never kept a record of it," Rey shook her head.

“Wonderful,” Poe said, easing the ship back into a stable position. “Was not looking forward to the Sith getting mad at us. 2V! That hyperdrive ready yet!?”

“Almost, Captain Dameron!” 2V chimed from the panel behind them. “On my mark in three... two... one...”

At one, Poe hit down on the lever and the ship lurched forward as the blackness of space gave way to the comforting blue tunnel of Hyperspace. Rey and Poe leaned forward in relief as they could finally take their hands off the controls.

“If I ever see that slug again, it’ll be too soon,” Rey growled.

“First Order wants us dead. Hutts want us dead,” Poe remarked grimly. “Is there really someplace in the galaxy where someone doesn’t want to kill us?”

“Republic Space,” Rey suggested. “Though Alie might be a grey area in that regard.”

“Case in point,” Poe remarked. “Who would have imagined that Wild Space would become a safe haven for us. Maybe we should all just become hermits when we land on Odessen. It’s harder for people to bother you when you’re a hermit.” He turned to look at Rey, a cheeky grin on his face. “Isn’t that a classification of Jedi? Jedi hermits?”

“Only if you’re a drunken failure moping over your pathetic excuse of an apprentice,” Rey said with a snicker.

“...Wait, Luke Skywalker was a drunk?” Poe asked incredulously. “Now I’ve heard everything.”

“He wasn’t, but he was close enough,” Rey shrugged. “You know the reason he was hiding was because he blamed himself for Kylo Ren’s fall?”

Poe’s mouth formed a thin line. “...I mean I can kinda see the logic in that. ...Don’t think it was worth kriffing off to uncharted space, though.”

“It was a pretty big wake up call, especially when I learned he killed Alie’s mother and scarred her for life and hadn’t so much as thought twice about it,” Rey said, gripping the controls harder.

“...Oh... yikes.” Poe said, unable to think of any other response. “And... she was on that planet with you and him for... how long again?”

“Three months,” Rey said, looking down into her lap. “She never told me. I put the pieces together myself.”

“Huh,” Poe said, keeping his gaze on the serene almost hypnotic tunnel of hyperspace before them. “I guess it’s true what they say. You shouldn’t meet your heroes.”

“He didn’t want to train me. Alie strong-armed him into it. He had such a defeatist attitude toward the Force and the Jedi. Reading through the archives Alie kept I could kind of understand it, but I don’t see why he couldn’t just change things for the better? Why just give up like that?”

“Some people seem to take comfort in the idea that things will never get better. That way they don’t have to try and fix anything. They can be complacent.” Poe said with a shrug. “It’s why recruitment into the Resistance is so damn slow. People are just too afraid to think they can make a difference.”

“Yeah... I wasn’t getting anywhere with him. If Alie hadn’t come, I don’t think I would have gotten any worthwhile training,” Rey sighed as she sat back in her seat. “She arguably trained me more than Luke did. I might have been a lot worse off if it wasn’t for her.”

“Wait, so Aliana convinced the man who killed her mother to train you?” Poe asked in disbelief. “...Wow, if there was any doubt that woman loved you before, it’s sure as hell gone now.”

“I’d already known,” Rey shrugged. “I... she told me she loved me on the flight back from Ilum... under duress.”

“Duress?” Poe asked. “What did you force a confession out of her?”

Rey looked away from Poe and nodded. “I thought she had ulterior motives for coming to get me. She said she just wanted me to be okay, and I demanded to know why she was so concerned about me. I even pulled the Falcon out of Hyperdrive and refused to re-engage it until she told me. I thought she wanted an apprentice or something. I... wasn’t prepared to hear the real reason.”

“...Oh, damn.” Poe said quietly. “So it was either tell you or get blown up by the First Order. You don’t fight fair, do you Rey?”

“I’d only just found out she was Sith a day ago!” Rey said defensively. “She kept that from me, I thought I was being played. I thought she just wanted something from me... like everyone else did at that point.”

“Ok, I get that. But couldn’t that conversation have waited until after you guys got back to D’Qar?” Poe asked. “I understand feeling betrayed like that, but Aliana did risk her own life to save you, and the Hosnian system to boot. Didn’t stopping a system killer by herself warrant not putting a blaster to her head and forcing a confession out of her? At least until you guys were safe?”

“I was angry and panicking,” Rey explained, though her face carried enough regret for Poe to see that she didn’t disagree with him. “I’m not exactly proud of it. Especially with the way she was crying...”

Poe sighed. “Well... so long as you aren’t doing these kinds of things on a regular basis.” Poe said, his tone softer. “Alie’s been through enough hell already in this war. I didn’t want to find out that you were giving her more.”

“Trust me, I don’t want to put her through any more pain,” Rey shook her head.

Then, something occurred to her. A fact about that night on the Falcon that she hadn’t considered before then. When she’d pulled the ship out of Hyperspace and demanded to know the truth, Aliana was panicking. Of course she would be, she had no expertise with flying a ship, let alone one as heavily modified as the Falcon. Rey had left them open to the First Order to get the truth out of her.

“Oh my god...” she whispered. “I threatened to kill her...”

“...Well... yeah, you did,” Poe nodded, his tone dry, but not antagonistic. “Like I said. You put the blaster to her head.”

“I didn’t realize... oh no! When Leia made that remark about hoping I put Alie out of their misery, Alie actually thought I might do it,” Rey realized, horror dawning on her face. “She said it was

because I was being so distant while training with Luke. But I'd already threatened her before..." she clapped her hand to her mouth as everything fell into place.

Poe was silent all throughout Rey's horrific epiphany. She didn't need him to put the pieces together for her. She was clearly doing that fine herself. It wasn't until Rey had remained quiet for more than a moment that he finally spoke. "Look... I'm not gonna judge you for whatever happened between you and Alie up to this point. But I'm gonna need you to make sure nothing like this happens again. I like to consider Aliana a friend. She saved my ass more times than she ought to and I want to make sure she lives to see the end of this war too." He turned in his pilot seat to better face Rey, his expression serious, yet compassionate.

"Alie went through a lot of hell for you. Make it count."

Rey glanced at Poe and nodded. She took her hand away from her mouth and wiped her eyes. "I promise. I know I was cruel to her for too long, I just... hadn't realized how much. That's going to change. I don't want her to suffer anymore. She's suffered enough for one lifetime..."

"Well alright," Poe said with a nod, satisfied with Rey's words. "I'll say if there's any of us who deserve a long, long shore leave, it's Alie. Give her enough time to mack on you and... seethe, or whatever Sith do."

Rey couldn't help but let out a giggle. Poe had an unnatural talent for finding levity in the most grim situations. "I will... would you excuse me for a moment?"

At Poe's nod, she stood up and left the cockpit, weaving through the dense crowd on the Fury's flight deck and to her quarters. As she closed the door behind her, she relished in the endless chatter of the Resistance being cut off into pleasant silence. She sat down beside the bed and looked at Aliana. The Sith had shifted in her sleep and was facing where she was sitting, her hand hanging loosely over the side of the bed. Rey took it and squeezed her fingers, bringing her hand to her lips and kissing her knuckles.

"When you wake up, I owe you an apology," she whispered, her other hand stroking Aliana's hair. "I didn't realize exactly what it was I'd done on the Falcon months ago. You tried to save me, and I spat in your face. I know I was angry, but I shouldn't have been so cruel to you. I shouldn't have been so quick to lash out at you."

She leaned forward and kissed Aliana's cheek, holding her hand close to her chest.

"I've truly been horrible to you, and you didn't deserve that," she said. "I'm so sorry, Alie..."

Aliana gave no indication that she had heard Rey's words, but to the Jedi, it didn't matter. She would have no qualms repeating her apology when she was awake. It wouldn't have been fair to only say such things when Alie was under and expect it to count. Aliana's sleeping face remained neutral but peaceful. Rey couldn't help but marvel at how peaceful she looked, only wishing she didn't need to be in a medically induced coma to experience such things.

"First chance we get, you and I are taking a long, long, *long* vacation," she whispered with a soft smile.

Her eyes roamed over Aliana's body, falling on the sight of a basic prosthetic where her natural leg once was. She wasn't very fond of the sight of it. Not so much that the sight of cybernetics unnerved her, but rather at the... basic look of the mechanism itself. It was inelegant, blocky and

rigid. Things that Aliana herself was not. She deserved a more suitable cybernetic. Something that was as functional and lovely as she was.

Rey blinked as an idea came to her. She pulled out the datapad from her sash and activated its scanner. Standing up, she held it out over Aliana as it gathered data on her physiology. More specifically, her measurements. Once the scan was complete, she looked over the data, the wheels in her head already turning. She would have to find the right materials and components before she could commit any serious time to this, but working out the schematics beforehand was something she could absolutely do. She couldn't give Aliana her original leg back, but she could make her a new leg that could make up the difference.

With a renewed energy, she set the datapad back into her sash and leaned in to kiss Aliana's forehead. She cupped the Sith's face with both hands as she was already working out core circuits and mechanisms in her head.

"Don't worry, sweetheart. I'll have the perfect replacement ready for you when you wake up. I promise."

Kriff Off Back Into Wild Space

To say that the sight of Odessen brought massive relief to the Resistance would have been an understatement. After weeks of being condensed in a single corvette ship not suited for more than a few dozen people at maximum, with little in the way of reprieve in the interim, the thought of being able to set foot on solid ground, breathe fresh air and not be shoulder to shoulder with other exhausted and stressed people, felt as though they were drinking water for the first time in weeks in a desert.

As the Fury landed in a valley, Resistance fighters piled out of the ship in an orderly fashion, just barely able to contain their relief at the feeling of freedom from their unavoidable constraints for the first time in so long. They all spread about the grassy plain, either laughing, cheering or laying on the pleasantly soft ground. The tension that culminated for weeks suddenly began melting away.

Rey herself was happy to finally have more breathing room, but her attention was more focused on Odessen itself. This planet was strong in the Force. That much she could gather. Still there was something unique about it. It was trickier to distinguish the light from the Darkness on this world. Not like on Ahch To. There were no wellsprings of life, nor any cold pits of the unfathomable. It all felt perfectly balanced. Sensing this planet, letting its energies seep into her, it was interesting. She didn't feel especially at ease or serene. She didn't feel passionate and full of unbridled strength. She felt even, content, like she just finished a meal that wasn't too filling to the point of becoming lethargic.

She let out a breath and smiled. Already she could tell this was going to be a good day. She followed the rest of the crew out toward the canyon they'd landed near. It was wide, about twenty five feet across with many outcroppings and indents in either wall. Leia had been right to choose the base of a canyon. It would serve as an ideal shelter from the elements as well as the First Order should they discover Odessen.

Crews began taking the mobile computers and operations consoles out of the Fury's cargo bay and setting them up in one of the outcroppings as Leia gathered everyone together.

"Alright everyone. We've got a lot to do and not much time to do it," she said to the growing crowd around her. "We don't have a cruiser, which means we need places for people to sleep and tools to get everything ready. I'm going to send a team to the other side of the planet to gather salvage from the old Alliance base to see if we can repurpose any of it, but until then we only have what we came here with. So we're going to have to get a little primitive in some cases."

"Are we gonna be making tents out of animal parts?" Poe asked with an arched brow. "Because I got no problem hunting but I don't think Rey's lightsaber will be very good at skinning."

"I won't need my lightsaber," Rey shrugged with an easy grin. "I can just pull the skin right off."

"OK, first of all: gross," Finn grimaced. "Second... no, actually. That's it. Just gross."

"Relax you two, we're not getting THAT primitive. I'm talking about wood," Leia scoffed, snapping her fingers to regain their attention.

"Oh, well that shouldn't be a problem," Rey said, looking at Finn. "Feel like practicing your form on some trees, Padawan?" she asked with a fond smile.

“Okay, do not call me Padawan,” Finn laughed, giving Rey a light shove. “And what is there to practice? Swinging low? I think I got that.”

“There’s always an opportunity to train, Finn,” Rey said. “Every action we make is a chance to test our skills.”

“Yes well, don’t indulge yourselves too much,” Leia interjected. “We’re gathering supplies first and foremost. Any extensive training can wait until after we get our new base operating.”

Rey and Finn nodded in agreement.

“Poe, Rose, and let’s see... you five,” Leia said as she singled out several rank and file grunts. “You’re going to take the Fury to the Alliance Base and see what you can recover. We want materials, computes, supplies, weapons, ships if they have any.”

“Yes, General,” Poe said with a nod. “Should we get Aliana off the ship before we go?”

“We don’t have anywhere else to place her safely,” Leia said shaking her head. “Just keep her in her quarters and fly carefully. I know that can be difficult for you.”

“I can fly a Corvette, General,” Poe rolled his eyes and motioned for the others to follow him.

Rey glanced back at the Fury anxiously. She didn’t like the idea of the Fury taking off without her. What if something happened? What if Aliana’s condition was worse? She clenched her fists as her pessimism ran rampant and pictured every situation where things could go wrong.

“Rey?” Finn asked, drawing her attention to him. “You okay?”

“Y-Yeah, I’m okay,” Rey said, before turning back to Fury. “I’m just... nervous.”

“Hey, Aliana’s gonna be okay,” Finn said, placing a comforting hand on Rey’s shoulder. “Poe won’t let anything happen to her. He cares about her and you too much for that.”

“I know, I just... I’d just rather she be left with me,” Rey said as she started wringing her hands. “So I know she’ll be safe...”

“I hear you,” Finn said, nodding in understanding. “And hey, the sooner we get some shelter figured out, the sooner you can get back to looking after her. Sound good?”

“Yeah, I guess,” Rey whispered as she watched the Fury start to take off. She took a tentative step forward as it lifted from the ground as if meaning to give chase, but stopped herself before she could break into a run.

“C’mon,” Finn said, gesturing for her to follow. “We got some trees to inconvenience.”

“Yeah alright...” Rey slumped as she followed Finn off into the forest.

It was fortunate that the Alliance base had a considerably large and spacious lander for them to land in. Fortunate still was the fact that upon landing, Poe could see a few other corvettes laying before them. They appeared extremely old and perhaps irreparable, but certainly salvageable. Already, they were looking at a promising haul.

As Poe lowered the landing ramp, the team filed out and began searching the base. Rose activated a probe and sent it ahead to scan the base as they trailed behind giving everything a closer look. Having been more exposed to the elements than the rest of the base, the hanger had a great deal of greenery seeping from inside the cracks of the stone walls surrounding them and enveloping the technology that fell into disrepair.

“It’s exciting isn’t it?” Rose asked Poe as he stepped down the ramp.

“What is? The amount of dust we’re at risk of inhaling?” Poe asked with a light cough after kicking up a rather heavy cloud of dust.

“No, that we’re exploring a piece of history!” Rose exclaimed. “Have you read about the Eternal Alliance? This is where the Republic and the Sith Empire banded together to fight a tyrant from Wild Space.”

“Jedi and Sith teaming up against a greater threat?” Poe asked as he examined a piece of a tattered republic vessel. “Guess the more things change, the more they stay the same, huh? Did that reading ever talk about what happened to them?”

“They eventually disbanded from what I recall,” Rose said as she and Poe examined the ships in the hanger. “Though the two commanding officers never really left Oddessen.”

“Alie’s ancestors, right?” Poe mused as he started placing his findings on a datapad. “Wonder if there’s anything of theirs that’s here. If we find anything that looks... Beniko-esque she should take it with us. Surprise her with it when she wakes up.”

“I guess, but what would something Beniko-esque look like?” Rose asked as she opened the weapons cabinets.

“Sithy, spooky, surprisingly romantic,” Poe said with a smirk as he leaned down to look at BB-8 who came rolling up to him. “Hey buddy what did you find?”

The spherical droid responded with a series of enthusiastic beeps and whirs.

“Jedi stuff? What like lightsabers or something?”

The droid conveyed a negative respond and attempted to beep and chirp with more clarity.

“Cubes and pyramids? ...Oh, those holocron things! Great find, buddy!” Poe said, giving BB-8 a fond pat on the head.

“There’s a bunch of recent holorecordings here,” Rose said as she went through one of the active computers. “They start from thirty-five years ago.”

“Really?” Poe asked, making his way to the computer at a brisk pace. “Well this oughta be something. Alright, put it on.”

Rose hit a few buttons and started up the first on the holorecords. She stepped back as the projector showed a woman in her early twenties. She looked a little bit like Aliana, except for her hair which was pulled back into a bushy ponytail.

“It looks like this is my home for the foreseeable future,” the projection said, looking exhausted. “I can’t go back into Imperial space for a while. My mother, she... Vader... if I ever see Vader I’ll kill

him. I'll get my revenge."

Rose watched the holo continue, her eyes wide and her attention completely rapt. Poe stroked his chin as she gave the holo an even gaze, ingesting the information with a seemingly neutral expression.

"...I have to stay here in the meantime," the projection of the woman carried on. "Collect myself, gather my strength. Staying alive is my top priority. I'll see what I can do about supplies in this place. Not much here looks usable, but maybe I'll be lucky. I still have some contacts I could reach out to. See if I can find some work to get back on my feet. The galaxy stops for no woman it seems."

"Who is she?" Rose asked quietly.

"I have a hunch, but I just want to be sure..." Poe said as he ran a recording somewhere in the middle of the list. The same woman, but with her hair down and tied into small braids was projected before them.

"Well... it's over. It hurt so much, but it's over," the woman whispered. "2V's checking her for any problems, but he said that she'll probably be healthy. I hope so. I never really expected this, I almost couldn't believe it. But now that she's finally here... there's nothing I wouldn't do for my daughter. I think I'll call her Aliana. That's a pretty name."

"I was right," Poe said with a vindicated grin.

Rose said nothing and instead cupped her hands to her mouth. She suddenly blinked rapidly, her eyes burning slightly as she fought back against tears. "This was her mother," she said softly.

"It is. You think you can make copies of these holos?" Poe asked.

"Maybe," Rose said as she glanced at her datapad. "These are some pretty old encoders, but I should be able to adapt the projectors to play them on modern tech. They might have some useful information though. You want to go through them?"

"Yeah sure. Beats sifting through dust," Poe said before turning back to look at BB-8. "Hey BB-8, you stick with Rose. Make sure she has everything she needs for this mission. We might be hauling some stuff back so do what you can."

The droid chirped in affirmation as he rolled up to Rose, somehow appearing to be happy despite having no capacity for expression. Poe left him and Rose to sift through the holorecords for anything that might tell them about resources or the layout of the base. Anything that could make searching and stripping the base easier. Rose pulled up a crate to sit on as she played another clip on the records, several entries before the one they'd just watched.

"I had an encounter with Vader," seethed a slightly older Mayrik, "Almost tore the hand off the bastard too. But he had that damn assassin with him. If it weren't for Starkiller I would have had Vader's head. That boy is way too powerful, I need a new approach. In the meantime, I'm just going to get back to training. Mother never named me a Darth, so I guess I should get back to work..."

"Huh, Starkiller," Poe mused. "Have to show Marek this one later." He skipped through a few more entries before landing on one nearing the end.

"...It feels like I looked away for only a moment and suddenly I'm the last of the Sith," Mayrik said, shaking her head. Apparently a Jedi defeated Vader and the Emperor. Skywalker. The last of Bane's Order falls into oblivion and suddenly the Jedi return just to keep making life difficult for the Sith. I have to be careful. I have no idea how powerful this Skywalker is, but I can't imagine he's a pushover. Aliana will be old enough to start her training before long. I can't let that catch his attention. Whatever else happens, Aliana needs to stay alive. I don't think I could live with myself if I lost her. ...I'll think of something. We'll get through this."

Poe winced as he watched Mayrik's expression turn grim and worried at the idea of losing Aliana. For all her faults, and according to Rey she suspected there were many, Mayrik loved her daughter more than anything and desperately wanted to keep her safe. He hit another button and played the very next clip.

"That slug has really gone over the edge this time," Mayrik seethed. "He's got me taking some little girl to Jakku for scrap work. Said he bought her off her own parents. What kind of parents... whatever, there's nothing I could do. The girl's strong in the Force, but it doesn't matter. I need the money from Niima's work. I'd love to just take the girl and kriff off back into Wild Space, but... Niima doesn't take defiance kindly. If it were just me I'd do it in a heartbeat... but I have my own little girl to worry about."

Poe's eyes widened as the meaning of the Sith's words very quickly fell into place in his head. Little girl. Jakku. Scrap Work. "...Oh... kriff," He said with a frown. This confirmed Rey's suspicions that Mayrik had taken her to Jakku. Though she seemed torn up about it, Poe wasn't sure if that would matter to Rey.

Rose glanced at Poe with a nervous look on her face, "Should... should we tell her?"

"If we don't and Rey finds out anyway, that will cause some even more problems," Poe said, hanging his head slightly. "I know this might cause some problems, but if it's about Rey, she deserves to know. I..." Poe trailed off, an unpleasant feeling writhing in his gut. "...I just hope she doesn't take it out on Aliana. Rey promised she'd treat her better, but I don't know how she's gonna react to this."

"That's what I'm worried about," Rose sighed. "How much does Alie know about this? If she were awake it'd be easier."

"But she's not, and that's what bothers me," Poe shook his head. "Rey held onto that anger over Alie not telling her she was Sith for a long time. If she's allowed to stew in this, who knows what might happen."

"Maybe there's more here," Rose said, almost desperately.

Poe turned his gaze back to the computer as he once again sifted through the files.

"No jobs running children to slave planets lately. Thank the Force," Mayrik began. "Still, Niima's being pretty stingy about compensation lately. Apparently safe guarding one of his clients doesn't pay as well as hauling free kriffing labor! Dammit, I hate that slug!" The Sith continued to seethe, pacing back and forth momentarily before she continued. *"I hope Aliana doesn't have to go through this. I suppose that's just me being a mother, wishing a better future for my kid, but... I sincerely hope the galaxy is a better place when she gets older. Wishful thinking I know, but it's pretty much all that's keeping me going these days. To make sure Aliana gets the chance at a future*

where she won't have to do the things that even a Sith can't be proud of. ...And maybe a future where she's safe from Jedi. That would be nice."

Poe immediately clicked to the next recording, hoping something better would be there. Instead of Mayrik, the image of what looked like a young teenager appeared. She was clearly distraught, and was growling as she threw things around that the projector didn't record.

"KRIFING HELL!" the girl screamed as she slashed at something with her lightsaber, *"I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS! THAT KRIFING JEDI-"*

She stopped mid rant and let out a scream that sounded unnaturally sharp and even made Rose clamp her hands over her ears. She fumed and seethed for a bit before falling into a chair, in tears.

"The Jedi... Skywalker," the girl said quietly. *"He and his apprentice, they... they attacked us out of nowhere and... they... they... they killed Mom..."*

Poe grimaced. This young gangly teenager was Aliana. An Aliana who had the image of her mother being killed by Jedi fresh in her mind. A child overflowing with rage and sorrow and grief. Her anger seemed to burn out after a moment as she proceeded to mumble something the aged audio projectors could make out before she simply collapsed into tears. Her broken sobs and cries of utter anguish made Poe's chest tighten. Rose was already letting tears fall at the sight of it.

"I feel like we shouldn't be watching these," Poe said quietly. "If Aliana wanted us to know this, she would have shown us herself."

"R-Right," Rose nodded, already closing the file. She looked down at her datapad. "...So... Should we examine the rest of the base?"

"Yeah..." Poe said, getting up and stepping away from the console. "BB-8, download these to a datapad for Rey. She needs to see them at least. Or at least we can't keep it from her."

He was quiet and distant as he and Rose headed down one of the corridors.

"I feel... I don't know... guilty?" Rose said, her face scrunched up as she tried to articulate her thoughts. "I know we couldn't have known but I feel like we invaded Aliana's privacy. Like we delved too deep into something very personal."

"I hear you," Poe said. "We'll just have to be more careful from here on out. If there's any data here that can be salvaged, we simply make a copy and move on. Let the Force crew sort it out."

"Yeah, alright," Rose nodded. "Do... do you think we owe her an apology?"

"...I think we do," Poe said with a sigh. "With everything that girl has been through, she certainly didn't need us seeing this. We'll explain the situation and apologize to her when she's well enough. Don't want to overwhelm her with bad news straight out the gate." "Sure," Rose agreed as she opened a storage locker to find several blaster rifles inside. "...It was hard watching that. She's usually so collected. I've never seen her that upset."

"Me neither," Poe said as he examined one of the old weapons. "But we were all children once. Though not all of us ever have to deal with grief at that age."

“I grew up in a mining colony, but I still had my parents,” Rose said as she kept her eyes to the floor. “She looked no older than... what, thirteen maybe? And it was Luke Skywalker who did that to her?”

“If it were anyone else who told me that, I wouldn’t believe it either. But I know Aliana. She wouldn’t lie about this. Rey confirmed it too.” Poe finished his examination of the blaster before putting it back in the locker. “These are in pretty good shape. If we can’t fix them up, they should be good for parts.”

“Alright, I’ll get the others to bring them to the ship,” Rose said as they moved on to the next few rooms. “Doesn’t this feel like we’re ransacking her home? Her and her mother lived here...”

“Trust me, the implications of this aren’t lost on me either,” Poe agreed. “But we don’t have much of a choice. It’s because of Aliana that we even have this planet to run to. I’m going to figure she’d know we would do something like this. If she didn’t... we’ll just tell her it was the General’s idea.”

“...But it *was* the General’s idea,” Rose said, looking confused.

“I know. I didn’t say we had to lie,” Poe said with an easy smirk.

Rose nodded and said nothing else as they continued looking through the base. All she could think about was the way her friend had broken down into tears like that. And the fact that they might just end up handing Rey something that only made things worse.

“Captain, how are we supposed to find one Corvette who’s location has never been tracked before?” Caij asked as the Mantis sped through Hyperspace. “If the First Order can’t find the Fury, what makes you think we will?”

“That is what we hired you to find out,” Phasma said with a sneer that felt visible even through her helmet. “If you can’t figure it out for yourself, then perhaps we should reconsider your contract.”

“And does she really need to be watching the entire time?” Caij scoffed.

“No she doesn’t,” the bounty hunter, Vaax. “If the First Order doesn’t want me to find their Sith, then I don’t need to find their Sith. You wanna take this job to someone else, prissy, be my guest. Otherwise, get off my back and let me work.”

Phasma said nothing, her response coming in the slight tilt of her helm. “... Then work quickly,” she uttered finally before turning away from the two before the transmission cut.

“Ugh, finally,” Caij said, sighing in relief and slumping against his seat. “I thought she’d never stop with her looming.”

“These Imperial types are all the same,” Vaax shrugged. “Gotta micromanage everything like a fussy mom. There’s a reason they have to call in help to get their work done. Can’t do anything when you’re too obsessed with your soldiers’ helmet polish. It’s no wonder a Jedi and a Sith are clowning on them like this.”

“Jedi and Sith,” Caij said, shaking his head. “You ever thought we’d be getting a gig like this? I thought I was gonna be busting petty crooks for pocket change for the rest of my days. I mean, don’t get me wrong, it’s a nice change of pace. Just want to make sure I’m not too rusty, y’know?”

“Well ya better get to exercising soon,” Vaax snickered. “Sith are dangerous, even when they’re injured. The Jedi shouldn’t be a problem, but if you don’t keep your wits about you then the Sith will be wearing your innards as a necklace.”

“Can’t say I’d appreciate that,” Caij said with a shudder. “Speaking of, better check that intel sent us.” The other bounty hunter reached over to press some buttons on the terminal. A blue light emanated from a lens to reveal the visage of Darth Amorosa and an extensive roll of text that comprised all the data the First Order had collected. “...Damn, so we’ve had two different flavors of Sith hiding from the wider galaxy at the same time. These folks love their cloak and dagger shtick, huh?”

“Looks like it,” Vaax said as his eyes scanned the information. “Wait, hold on...”

He read over some of the choice words the First Order used to describe Amorosa and some alerts started going off in his head. The First Order dedicated a single paragraph to Amorosa’s interference in their affairs, and another twelve to ranting about all the ways she didn’t fit their mold.

“We sure their story about doing damage to the First Order is accurate?” Vaax asked. “The way they write it, it sounds more like we’re just hunting a gay woman for their own sick amusement.”

“Oh, so gay women are on their lists of ‘degenerates’ too?” Caij asked. “Kriffin’ figures. I guess we’ll have to see when we find her. If she’s not as dangerous as we’ve been informed will just charge them extra for having us waste our own time and resources on this.”

“Something’s screwy here,” Vaax shook his head as he looked at the other dossier. “These two look like they’re still kids. How do kids make the First Order this desperate?”

“Best I can tell, these Force types can be dangerous at any age,” Caij shrugged. “Wasn’t Skywalker like... sixteen when he blew up the Death Star?”

“Eighteen,” Vaax corrected. “Thing is though, Skywalker was a Jedi. It’s the Sith that confuses me. If she’s that powerful, why is the First Order even hunting her? Shouldn’t a Sith that strong be Supreme Leader by this point?”

“Pretty sure those twelve paragraphs answer that question,” Caij replied, gesturing to the projected dossier. “I’d bet this ship that those mooks would sooner put a blaster barrel in their mouths and pull the trigger than they would take orders from a gay woman.”

Vaax snorted. Caij was right. The First Order was violently homophobic. But they also had a habit of bending the knee to the Sith. They practically worshipped Vader and Sidious. Either way, this was started to sound less like a typical warzone job and more like he was being hired to hunt kids for sport.

“I don’t like this. This is too suspicious,” Vaax shook his head. “The Resistance I get, but why are they so insistent that the Jedi and Sith be kept alive?”

“Well this Supreme Leader type seems as sadistic as he does impotent. Perhaps the thought of torturing those two into submission really... ignites his lightsaber,” Caij proposed, a cynical smile crossing his face. “Course he’s too useless to do it himself so they call us in.”

“What are you talking about?” Vaax asked, glaring at Caij.

“I’m saying that this Kylo Ren guy gets off on tormenting girls,” Caij said matter-of-factly.

Vaax shuddered and closed the dossiers, “Disgusting weasel. And he’s hired us to catch his prey? What a kriffing rat.”

“I hear you. Lot’s of sickos in the galaxy. May as well have us collecting Twi’lek slave girls for him while we’re at it.” Caij said, shaking his head. “I hope they do prove a challenge to catch. Otherwise this job is gonna leave me feeling sick.”

“Yeah, that’s the only thing that’s gonna make you sick,” Vaax scoffed. “I wanna see if everything’s on the up and up. Because if they’re not, I’m not hunting kids for some crazy old man to toy with.”

“Well, alright then,” Caij shrugged. “It’s technically your contract.”

“No technically about it. My ship, my contract,” Vaax said firmly. “Let’s find them first. Can’t do much until then at least.”

“Poe and Rose brought a list of supplies from the base. It’s not much, but it’ll get us started,” Leia sighed as she sat down on a crate. “We’ve got a lot of work ahead of us.”

“Don’t we always?” Holdo said with a wry smile as she kneeled down beside Leia, offering her a cup of hot caff. “I checked the direction that Finn and Rey went off to. There appear to be fewer trees than there were a moment ago so I gather they’re doing pretty well.”

“I saw the trees that were clearly Rey’s handiwork,” Leia sighed as she accepted the cup and took a sip before wincing. “Aliana just puts seasoning in everything, doesn’t she?”

“The girl likes flavor. What can I tell you?” Amilyn giggled. “Rey once told me that her lips even taste like cinnamon.”

“Why were you two discussing the flavor of Aliana’s lips?” Leia asked, turning a raised eyebrow to Amilyn.

“You’d be surprised just how long and extensively Rey will gush about her when given the freedom to. Aliana herself is more or less the same way. Just more particular about who she gushes to.” Amilyn sighed, leaning back against the crate. “There’s very few things in this galaxy as inspiring as young love.”

Leia smiled a little, “Yeah I guess so. I was worried about the way Rey seems to only focus her attention on Aliana, but I guess it makes sense considering she grew up alone. She only just found people she cares about, it figures that’s what she focuses on.”

“Indeed. I’m sure she’ll find more people to care for once the galaxy finds peace again,” Amilyn offered. “I understand your concern, but I think Rey is capable enough to keep this from becoming an obsession. It should help when Aliana wakes up.”

“Actually that reminds me,” Leia said, setting her cup down. “Did Rey’s stunt back on Crait worry you at all?”

“...You mean how she... well, for lack of a better word, toyed with Ren?” Amilyn asked before her brow furrowed in thought. “...It was probably cathartic for her, but... I’d be lying if I said simply

killing him wouldn't have been better."

"That's the thing. She and Aliana have been talking for weeks about how they were going to kill him," Leia shook her head. "But then the opportunity presented itself and she opted to just torture him. And he got away again."

Amilyn winced. "...Yeah. We should probably talk to her about that to make sure that doesn't happen again." Silently, she was quite surprised at how casually Leia seemed to infer that Rey should have killed the son she fought so hard to try and save, but she thought better than to speak those thoughts aloud. There was a time and place for such things. "I'm sure she's probably kicking herself already for not ending him when she had the chance, but I would like to make sure she doesn't make that mistake again."

"I wonder if it's even possible to correct that," Leia wondered aloud. "With Luke gone, Rey's only training is going to come from Aliana. And Rey's already shown she can't keep control of herself when she's drunk on the Dark Side."

"It'll be okay, Leia," Amilyn insisted. "Rey has a good heart. So long as she remembers why she's fighting she won't lose sight of what's important."

"That's exactly what I'm worried about," Leia said with a pained expression. "Both of them are more devoted to each other than the Resistance. Aliana said as much herself. And with Aliana so grievously injured, I wonder if Rey will consider sticking around to be worth it."

Amilyn frowned. As pessimistic as it was, Leia's words were true. It wasn't doused in her typical light side dogma or fear mongering which made it more difficult to contest with. Given the circumstances, it wasn't outside the realm of possibility that Rey would take Aliana away from this war and into the farthest reaches of space to keep her safe. Those two were crazy about each other. What that meant for the Resistance depended on whether they both thought it was worth fighting for.

"...Perhaps things will get better once we manage to make the Republic see reason," Amilyn offered. "Once Rey sees the Republic for what it is, I'm sure she'll become more invested in protecting freedom and justice in the galaxy."

"I suppose the galaxy hasn't given her much reason to care about anything besides the people close to her," Leia conceded. "I just hope she doesn't leave before we can change that."

"You really did that?" Finn asked, raising an eyebrow. "Rey, that's just cruel."

"The bastard nearly killed Alie!" Rey protested, swinging low to send her lightsaber through another tree. "He's lucky I didn't lop off any of his limbs as payment. I'd mount them on my wall if they didn't rot."

"Yeah, but Rey you could have just killed him and been done with it," Finn argued. "Don't get me wrong, I'm not showing pity for Kylo Ren. But that kind of twisted fixation on torture is the kind of thing I'd expect to see *from* him."

"A fair point," Rey said, slowing the fall of the tree through the Force. "It was indulgence on my part. The next time I see him, I'm killing him on sight."

“I hope so,” Finn said, deactivating his lightsaber and laying a hand on Rey’s shoulder. “I understand why you want to make him suffer. But we can’t afford to keep letting him escape like this. Just... I don’t want to see you with a lightsaber in your gut next, okay?”

Rey paused, taking in Finn’s words before she smiled and placed a hand on his shoulder in kind. “You won’t Finn,” she said reassuringly. “Thanks.” She pulled Finn into a hug, relishing in the pleasant feeling. Finn always gave really good hugs.

Finn squeezed Rey’s shoulders and tucked her head under his chin. “Of course. I want you both to make it out alive. You’re my friends. The first ones I ever had.”

“You’re our friend too,” She said, smiling as she pulled away, still keeping a hand on his upper arm. “Don’t worry. We’re all going to make it out of this war alive. We won’t let Kylo Ren get away again. I promise you.”

“I’ll hold you to that,” Finn smiled as he pulled away and picked up his lightsaber. “You think that’s enough trees?” He asked as he took a step back and looked at the kilometer-wide clearing they’d made.

“I think so,” Rey said with a nod. Extending her hand outwards, a rather large collection of tree trunks suddenly lifted into the air. “I got these ones. Will you be okay getting that batch?” she asked, gesturing to the fallen trees on Finn’s end.

“I think so?” Finn said as he extended a hand and focused. He hadn’t been able to practice much with the Force between everything that had happened on the Raddus, but he’d been studying the datapad Aliana had given him and had been working on the basis.

“Try not to think about lifting a large weight,” Rey instructed, “But more like moving them in zero gravity.”

“Oh, alright. That should help.” Finn turned back to the fallen trees as he closed his eyes. He pictured them and the lumber being in space. Free from gravity’s pull. Free of any power to move them except his own. His hand shifted, his thoughts trying to coax the logs upward.

The logs raised into the air.

He shifted his hand again ever so slightly, wanting to stop them from simply flying out of his grip. He kept the floating lumber steady before his mind gave them a gentle push forward.

“...Am I doing it?” he asked, his eyes still closed.

“Yeah, you’ve got it,” Rey smiled as she patted his shoulder. “Now gently ease them along with you.”

“Okay. Easy. Easy does it,” Finn muttered to himself as he slowly moved the logs forward. Rey kept his eye on him, making sure he didn’t trip on a protruding root whilst he was concentrating.

They managed to ease the lumber back down the path and toward the canyon, where they dropped them into a neat little pile with the other raw materials that had been scavenged from the Alliance base. Piles of scrap metal and crates full of electrical components. Rey was already thinking about the value of some of these components as she dove into one of the crates and started sifting through them, her scavenger instincts getting the better of her.

“I figured that’s what you would go for first,” Poe said, walking up to Rey. “Guess old habits die hard, don’t they?”

“Bite me,” Rey smirked up at Poe. “Find anything useful in the Alliance computers? Information? Resources? Star charts, anything?”

“Some old corvettes, holocrons, weapons that could be used for parts if not simply repaired, some charts of wild space and... a few old holorecordings.” Poe plucked a datapad off of his belt and handed it to Rey. “There were some from Aliana’s mother. ...I thought you’d want to know.”

Rey’s eyes widened as she grabbed the datapad, “Darth Mayrik?! Alie told me she had no holorecordings of her. How were these still intact?!” she asked as she scrolled through the list of recordings.

“The computer we found them in has seen better days, but Rose was able to get it working,” Poe explained. “Knowing Alie’s luck with tech, she must have thought those records were gone for good and moved on.”

“Oh wow...” Rey said quietly as she held the datapad gingerly in her hands. “Is... is there anything in here about... Mayrik’s work?”

“Ohhh, yeah,” Poe said with a grimace. “...Among other things.”

“What other things?” Rey asked, looking up at the both of them. “C’mon guys, tell me what I’m in for here.”

Poe looked around, making sure there was no one within earshot that could listen in. He stepped closer to Rey before speaking softly. “The last entry on there is Alie’s.’ It’s after her mom died. I... I never saw her so upset before.”

Rey’s shoulders slumped as she looked back down at the datapad with a worried expression on her face. She’d always figured that Aliana would have been in a volatile state right after losing her mother, but to have it at her fingertips... it felt wrong. Like she shouldn’t have it. Truth be told, she didn’t want to see Aliana in that position *ever* .

“Oh my god...” she whispered as she scrolled down the list to the final entry and looked at it’s name. Even just seeing it on a list felt wrong.

“Exactly. I was tempted to just erase it before we transferred the data,” Poe said, crossing his arm. “I felt that you should probably have the final say on that decision though.”

“I guess,” Rey said as she stuck the datapad into her belt. “I’ll go through the others later. Was there anything else in the base?”

“Nothing we couldn’t get onto the Fury in one piece,” Poe shrugged. “We did find what looked like a cantina. Rose and I were gonna take bets to see if any of the drinks were still good, but neither of us had the nerve to be the test subject. You wanna give it a try?”

“Three thousand year old wine? Sure,” Rey smirked as she got to her feet. “If I don’t die, I’m taking your X-Wing.”

“Alright, but if you do, I’m getting that lightsaber,” Poe chuckled before turning over to look at Rose. She was looking over a datapad with Amilyn, displaying what they’ve managed to collect. “Rose! You still got that bottle?”

“...Yeah, wh-?” Her face fell as she noticed that Rey was beside him. “Oh, God. Rey, did he talk you into this?” She shook her head and pulled a large, very old looking bottle from the satchel that hung from her shoulder. “You know how insanely dangerous this is, right?”

“Yeah I know, but gimme,” Rey smirked as she took the bottle and uncorked it. “Wine just gets better with age anyway.” With that she put the bottle to her lips and took a swig of the contents. Almost immediately she felt the sting of aged wine and shuddered as she forced it down her throat.

“OH GOD! That’s got a kick to it!” Rey wheezed as she wiped her lips. “Feels like it just punched me in the stomach.”

“I am shocked you didn’t immediately spit it out,” Rose said, her eyes wide. “I’m even more shocked that you’re still alive.”

“I guess Force types have a good liver,” Poe said with an easy smile. “Now Rey, you understand if I wait a full 24 hours before I just give you my X-Wing. I have to make sure the wine doesn’t kill you slowly.”

“Yeah sure,” Rey scoffed, hip-checking Poe and handing the bottle back to Rose. “Just get ready to hand over the ship tomorrow or I’ll shave your head.”

“Hey! Hey, hey, hey! No fair threatening a guy’s hair!” Poe placed a hand on the top of his head protectively as he spoke.

“I don’t know. I think bald would suit you,” Rose teased, placing the ancient wine in her satchel again.

“Well why don’t we shave your head instead? Or yours?” Poe scoffed as he looked from Rose to Rey. “Or better yet, shave Alie’s head. She won’t know, she’s in a coma.”

“Okay how DARE you even suggest touching her beautiful hair!” Rey balked. “Gimme the vibroblade, we’re gonna bald a pilot!”

“You stay away!”

“Rose, hold him down!”

The Republic is Not an Ally I Want to Have

Building a base of operations into a cliff face was no small feat, especially when accounting for the fact that many of the tools necessary for a job had to be constructed from scrap. Even with two capable Force sensitives, one of them being a very excellent scavenger, the process was arduous and dangerous. Quick thinking and immaculate reflexes on Rey's part were all that kept them from having any fatalities during construction when Resistance members would fall off their makeshift scaffolding. Even with their base being more less a man made cave, they still were rather sparse on supplies, having to use the scrapped hulls of the old ships from the Alliance base as fortification.

Even with the strenuous labor and questionable equipment, the Resistance base found itself in working order surprisingly quickly. There was still much work to be done before it could be anything close to resembling Republic standards, but with a series of bunks for the Resistance to rest and a War Room with power, they were ready to at least begin operating. Rey and Finn were especially relieved at not having to do the heavy lifting so consistently throughout the day.

"Everyone, gather round," Leia said, waving everyone over. "Alright, so now that we're all at operating capability, it's time to plan our next move. The first thing we need is proper resources and equipment. We need to procure them from somewhere, and the Republic is our only ally right now."

Rey perked up from her sketchbook at that and stood up. "The Republic? So it's finally time to go to Coruscant?"

Leia nodded with a smile. "Indeed. They've been hesitant to offer us aid before, but between the First Order officially declaring war on them, and with a Jedi among our ranks, I know they will be more receptive to our cause. Rey, you and Holdo will join me in Coruscant as we try to appeal to the Senate. Captain Dameron?" Her gaze turned to Poe who was sporting a slightly uneven haircut. "You will be in charge while we're away."

"Got it," Poe said, frowning as he gingerly reached up to touch the small bald spot on his head that Rey and Rose had managed to cut before Holdo had intervened.

"Are we just not telling them about the Sith?" Holdo asked curiously. "We'll be taking a Sith ship to get there."

"I was getting to that," Leia said, slightly exasperated. "Amorosa being a part of our cause may frighten the more skittish senators which could hurt our chances for official Republic support. However, once we explain how... invaluable that she's become to us, I am confident that enough of them will see reason."

"I'll make sure they think twice before they badmouth Alie," Rey said with an almost sinister smile.

"Save the violence for the battlefield, Rey," Leia stressed. "We are going to ask for the Republic's aid and I'm going to need you to at least look like the paragon of Jedi beliefs. If not, they may very well turn us away for good."

Rey's face fell and she started squeezing her fingers. Truth be told, acting like a Jedi was something she was terrible at. Even as she studied the Jedi's teachings she found it turned her into something

decidedly... not herself. She continued to call herself a Jedi for the sake of convenience, but truth be told she found herself leaning more and more toward the Sith every day.

Studying Mayrik's archives certainly didn't help. While the Jedi archives had been a lot of stuffy old monks trying to turn themselves into droids, Mayrik's recordings felt like something so much more human. She hadn't yet looked at anything flagged with her own name, but the way she talked about the Sith made them feel more real than the mythic view of the Jedi.

"I... I can try, General," Rey nodded.

"We can start with a change in wardrobe," Leia said with a smirk. "I know an excellent tailor planetside who can make you some white robes. That will certainly help your appearance." Leia turned to Finn, her expression curious. "Finn dear, what color is your lightsaber?"

"Silver," Finn replied. "Why?"

"Rey might need to borrow it for the trip," Leia clarified. "Anything that's near red will make the Senate jumpy."

"Aliana has a whole stock of crystals on the ship, I can just put one in one of my lightsabers," Rey scoffed, dismissing Leia's suggestion. "What colors do the Jedi use?"

"Blue and green, mostly," Leia said. "I've seen a few with purple or yellow, but they're usually outliers."

"Yellow's close to mine, so I'll grab one of those," Rey shook her head. "If we're getting new clothes on Coruscant, could I also get something a little more suited to me?"

"I suppose," Leia said, nodding in concession. "Do try to save them until after we get the Republic's aid though. We have to stay by the book."

Rey nodded, "Yes General. Is there anything else? Should I curtsy and balance a book on my head?"

"We can go over the specifics on the way there," Holdo said assuringly, an amused smile at Rey's banter. "I know it all sounds unnecessary, but it will go a long way."

"It's a lot for something that can be ruined by running the Fury's ID Signatures," Rey scoffed as she put her sketchbook away.

"Exactly," Leia said, her lips pursed into a thin line. "Taking this ship puts the mission at risk already. We need to make sure everything else is to the Senate's liking if we're going to get through to them."

"I don't suppose mind-controlling the Chancellor is an option?" Rey asked as she followed Leia toward the makeshift hangar.

"Absolutely not," Leia hissed through clenched teeth, thoroughly unamused. "That's the very suppression of freedom that we're actively fighting against."

"Oh sorry, and here I thought we were trying to win this war," Rey said sarcastically.

“You know Rey, you’re sounding more and more like a Sith every day,” Leia said, casting a worried glance back to her.

“I feel more like a Sith every day, honestly,” Rey shrugged.

“And that’s exactly what you WON’T tell the Senate,” Amilyn said, patting on Rey’s back gently as they made their way to the Fury.

Leia stopped just shy of the landing ramp to look back at Finn and Poe who walked with them to the hanger. “Captain Dameron, until we return, you will be handling my duties on High Command. Admiral Ackbar and Miss Tico will inform you of all you need to know. I will require regular status reports on everything that happens here. Is that understood?”

“Yes, General,” Poe said with a salute.

“Good, and Finn? Make sure the flyboy doesn’t get himself killed,” she added with a smirk.

“I dunno, General. That’s a pretty tall order,” Finn whistled, before being punched on the arm by Poe. “But I’ll try.”

“...And it looks like the Jedi are starting to cause trouble again,” the image of Mayrik on the holoterminal said, looking worn out and stressed. “Skywalker’s been tracking my ship for days. Only just found the tracking device and threw it out the escape pod. Explains how he’s been on top of me out of lightspeed so often. Aliana’s fine, though. She barely noticed a thing. Slept through the entire battle, the little angel.”

Rey sighed as she paused the recording before cupping her face in her hands. Going through these holorecordings filled her with a storm of conflicting emotions. She was looking at the woman who put her on Jakku. She shipped her like cargo for Niima the Hutt. She did work for that vile, gluttonous slug.

But she did it to keep her daughter safe.

The very daughter who lied on the other side of the room in a coma. The woman Rey loved more than anything and who didn’t think twice to sacrifice herself for.

She was starting to believe the Force itself had a twisted sense of humor.

She finally looked down at the recordings that were flagged with her name and sighed. They were in two groups. Niima’s records, and the Alliance’s records. She took the first from Niima and ran it.

At once, an image of Niima and Mayrik appeared. Mayrik looked particularly distressed.

“A girl?! You bought a girl?! From who?!” Mayrik demanded.

“It’s no business of yours, Sith. Just deliver her. Quickly,” the translator droid said.

“It’s most certainly my business! You bought a child to do scavenging work?! She’ll die out there! What craven lunacy is this?!” Mayrik yelled, her hand twitching toward her lightsaber.

“Craven lunacy that pays handsomely. Especially if there are no setbacks.”

Mayrik growled and took her hand away from her lightsaber. "This is just ridiculous. An adult would get your scrap more easily, what... oh no... you're leaving her to fend for ration packs, aren't you?"

"It's all in the business, Sith. Now get moving."

"...Fine." Mayrik growled as she stormed out of the frame.

Rey swallowed the bile that had formed in her throat. While it was a small comfort to know that Mayrik vehemently hated the idea of trafficking a child, it didn't cause the twisting in her stomach to dissipate. She took a deep breath, trying to center herself. Mayrik wasn't the one who sold her into slavery. Her parents did. Mayrik just took the job because she had to look after Aliana. It was wrong of her, but she knew her parents were the worse people. They had no love in their heart for their own child. The more she thought about it, the more she felt her anger and disgust shift towards them than Mayrik.

There was a holo from the base marked for later that same day. Sighing, she opened it hoping maybe there would be some more important info. Or at least something that would put her a little more at ease.

"Poor girl was crying when she boarded the ship," Mayrik said as she ran her fingers through her hair. It looked like she was recording while flying the ship through Hyperspace.

"Thankfully, Star's been watching her and she seems to have settled down. Probably keeping the girl amused with floating objects. She's only... five I take it? Only a few years younger than mine. That young and already thrown to the wolves. You know, five times today I've thought about just taking the girl and fleeing to Wild Space. If I didn't know Niima would hunt me with the entire fleet, I would. If I didn't have Star, I'd risk it. Maybe someday she'll be able to correct this. Pipe dream I know, but... you know I told the Jedi about this. Anonymous message. Only got dismissal. As much as I hate to say it, the old Jedi Order were a lot more cordial than this one. They met with my mother once. Can you believe it?"

Rey blinked. 'Star...' She turned to look at Aliana, still comatose and unmoving. She was on this ship before. She met Aliana before. All those years ago. How could she not have remembered? Even as young as she was back then, she remembered her parents. Or rather, she thought she remembered them, as sifting through these records had indicated, what she clung to as memories may very well have been fantasies.

Even still, the thought of meeting Aliana all those years ago and then forgetting felt so strange. The Sith had so quickly become her whole world. This very ship had felt more like home than any planet ever could hope to be. How could she truly not remember being on this ship for the first time? Did she repress it out of the sheer despair she had felt?

Her mind wandered to Mayrik's words. What if the Sith did just take her and run? What if spent her formative years under the care and tutelage of Darth Mayrik? What if, instead of being her lover, Aliana was her sister? Another thought that felt almost alien to her, but wasn't without its perks. The idea of being raised by an actual family... it was a pleasant notion.

Alas, she couldn't remiss what might have been. She could only make do with what she had. What she had wasn't much, but when she thought about everything Aliana was to her and what they stood to gain by winning this war together, it was enough.

Rey skipped through the rest as she glanced down at one that was an oddity from the others. There was little to be gained by watching most of them. Unless there was some grand revelation there wasn't much else to be gleaned from Niima's records. And such kind of revelations only occurred in hacky, hastily written holonovels. Probably made by Czerka Corporation.

But what stood out to her was that it was a mobile holorecording from years later and on a planet she'd never heard of. But it was still flagged with her name by the system. Curious, she opened it up.

Immediately she was met with the sight of cloaked figure with a hood over their face, stepping onto an unfamiliar looking ship.

"I'm the one who radioed you about the fuel cells?" the figure, whose voice was too garbled by data compression to make out.

"Oh yeah. C'mon in," said one of the pilots, a man who looked to be in his early thirties.

The figure stepped on board, what little Rey could see of their face obscured by the flickering image.

"Pretty roomy ship," the figure said as she looked around. "Just the two of you live here?"

"Use to be three," a woman said as she stepped into frame. "Had a kid here for a little while."

"Oh..." the hooded figure said before bowing their concealed face slightly. "I'm sorry for your loss."

"Ah, don't be," the man said, brushing it off. "Brat was a loudmouth, always yammerin about something or other."

"The best thing she did for us was sell at a high price," the woman said with a smug grin. "We splurged for days after that."

"...What?" the figure said, their distorted voice sounding much harder.

"We sold her to Niima the Hutt," the man clarified. "Slug loves himself some child labor."

"...You sold your own daughter because she was too loud?" the figure asked, "Seriously?"

"...Well and because we needed the money," the woman shrugged. "Times are tough. You understand."

"You just said you splurged," the figure said, walking around them. The position reminded Rey very much of a predator circling its prey. "Can't have been that impor-" they stopped as their foot kicked an ale bottle. Glancing down they noticed the floor was absolutely covered in them. "...I see. You sold your own daughter for beer money, didn't you?"

"So what if we did?" the man asked indignantly. "What do you care?"

"Call it a personal issue," the figure said as she pulled her hood down.

It was Aliana.

"I've been through some hell the last few months, and I don't take kindly to deadbeats," she seethed.

"What the-? Hey you're just a kid!" the woman balked. "Don't you go judging us! You don't know how tough it can be out here!"

"Sorry we can't all be perfect parents, but some of us have more important scrap to manage," the man added, crossing his arms. "Now if you still want those fuel cells, you'll drop the attitude."

"How about I just drop you?" Aliana asked, igniting her lightsaber.

"Kriffing hell, what the-"

Rey's mother hadn't even gotten her sentence out before her head was mercilessly cut from her body. Her father hadn't even had a chance to react before Aliana sliced him through the torso. Despite how quickly it had been done, Aliana was practically seething.

"Pardon me, Master. But perhaps it would have been better to get the girl's location before killing them," came the voice of 2V, clearly recording the encounter.

"DAMMIT!" Aliana screamed, kicking a crate. "2V end recording. Don't need it anyway."

Rey was speechless.

Aliana killed her parents.

Her heartless, black livered, deadbeat parents who sold her as if she were nothing more than scrap.

She got up slowly from the holoterminal as if the weight of her own thoughts slowed her movements. She walked over to Aliana, still resting peacefully on the bed. She reached down to stroke those perfectly freckled cheeks with the back of her fingers. "I have so much to thank you for," she said with a soft smile and eyes stinging with tears.

Aliana twitched slightly in her sleep and her head lolled in the direction of Rey's hand. If she didn't know better, it would have almost looked like she was leaning into her touch.

Rey's heart ached for Aliana. She wanted nothing more than to wake the Sith up and smother her with all the love and adoration she had been storing the past few weeks. That would have to wait, of course, but that waiting became harder and harder as time wore on. So Rey had to make sure she used that time well.

Her eyes fell upon the sketchbook that laid beside Aliana on the bed. Picking it up, she opened it to the pages she placed her marker. The sketches of the prosthetic leg were sound, if a little rough around the edges. She would finalize the layout soon, then she could get started putting it together. She'd decided to work a little more on the outer design. She'd already designed it for comfort and ease of use. Considering Aliana's issues with tech, she wanted her leg to be something she never had to fuss with. But now she wanted to make it as stylish and suited to her as possible.

She started making a list of metals that would be durable, pretty and light for the design. Perhaps Impervium. An expensive alloy, but she was certain she could trade for it.

"You deserve everything," she whispered softly.

Coruscant was not like any planet Rey had ever seen before.

In fact, it was horrible.

A smog-riddled hellscape, plagued by noise and bright lights as far as the eye could see. It was nothing like the verdant, green landscape of Takodana. In fact, it felt like a more grey Jakku. Rey was already hating this planet and she'd barely stepped onto a speeder.

"You alright, Rey?" Holdo asked as she looked over to the Jedi, her brow furrowed in concern.

"...Can't say I like city planets very much," Rey said, visibly grimacing as she looked around them. "Loud, dirty and suffocating. I can barely sense anything that isn't tension and frustration."

"It's the planet that never sleeps," Leia said. "You'll get used to it."

"I hope not."

Rey's head started pounding from the noise, and she hissed. Her fingers started sparking with lightning as she clenched them tight and tried to think of something to drown out the sounds of the city. It was too much, a cacophony of garbage interfering with her senses. She just wanted to electrocute the nearest speeder until it exploded.

"Well we have a suite waiting for us so you'll have plenty of time to relax and center yourself before the audience with the Senate tomorrow," Leia said, placing an assuring hand on Rey's shoulder. "Trust me. I know how frustrating this planet can be. Especially when you can sense it."

"How do so many people live so close to each other?" Rey asked, distressed by the racket in her brain. "How do they not go mad?!"

"Who says they don't?" Leia smirked. "Living in the democratic capital of the Republic isn't exactly a stress free environment."

"Especially not when you're a refugee," Holdo said, looking downward at the lower levels of the city that were just barely visible past the towering buildings and thick, congested traffic. "The First Order has been pressing more and more planets on the border. People with nowhere else to go come in by the cruiserload. More than the Republic can accommodate at once, or so they say."

"Or so they say? What, is the Republic just not doing anything about it?" Rey asked. "This city is massive, there's no way they can't house refugees."

"Oh they can," Leia confirmed. "It's just that with a city this large it's very quick to become... divided."

"The lower levels have a wellspring of corrupt property owners and gangs," Amilyn clarified, her expression more and more dire as she continued. "With the Republic's attention on external threats, they have less manpower to handle the growing problem of the wealthy carving up the planet amongst themselves."

Rey glanced over and saw a Coruscant security guard accosting a Twi'lek refugee and scoffed. "Really? Because it seems like they have time to stick guns in everyone's faces."

“When you’re wealthy enough, you can put almost anyone in your pocket,” Leia said with a downcast expression. “Official security teams make the best crime muscle.”

“Oh yeah?” Rey said, almost tauntingly. She reached her hand out and twisted her wrist. The guard’s head snapped violently to the side and he fell twitching to the ground. The Twi’lek glanced around in surprise, before getting up and sprinting away as fast as she could. “Hmm... seems like they need work.”

“Rey!” Amilyn exclaimed incredulously.

“He was accosting a refugee. What, was I supposed to just do nothing?!” Rey yelled.

“I was more expecting you to go torture him a bit until his fellow guards laid down suppressing fire allowing him to get away,” Leia said with a shrug. “You seem so fond of that tactic lately.”

“Well when a Coruscant guard breaks into my brain, tortures me, haunts me for months and threatens to kill my girlfriend and do... well, *very bad things* to me, THEN I’ll torture him,” Rey bit back.

“Okay, okay!” Amilyn said, hands outstretched as she tried to pacify the other two women. “We have enough to stress over without squabbling. Rey, I know you feel very strongly about all of this, but do please be careful how you use your powers here. We can’t afford to go to war with all of Coruscant.”

“You know what? I don’t think I like this idea of playing the good little Jedi,” Rey said, an idea forming in her head. “I’m the last Jedi. Don’t I get to dictate what the Jedi look like? Or what their lightsabers are?”

“Only if you’re dead set on operating from a hole in the ground,” Leia said. “Because without Republic support, that’s what we’re gonna be doing.”

“I’ve gotta be honest, Leia. Hearing how obsessed the Senate is with ceremony and keeping up appearances, how I need to look like an acceptable class of Jedi in order to be taken seriously, this is sounding more and more like the First Order,” Rey spat. She was absolutely furious at what she’d seen and heard about Coruscant. And she only just got here.

“It’s not perfect, I know,” Leia said. “Believe me, *I know*. This planet has given me more grey hairs than the galactic civil war ever did. But we can’t fix things here until we stop the First Order. Once the war is over, then we can focus all our attention on making life better for the people,” Leia turned in her seat slightly to focus on Rey. “Rey. Look at me. I need you to stay focused on why we came here. Best case scenario, we get Republic support and can put an end to the First Order quickly. Worst case scenario, they see you acting like a Sith, brand you AND Aliana as enemies to the Republic and leave you two on the run for the rest of your lives. Aliana is here, on a planet that HATE Sith. You do anything reckless here, you’re putting her very delicate life at risk.”

Rey paused as she thought about what Leia had said. Leia had started to learn exactly what nerves to pull to get Rey to stop arguing with her and comply and she hated that. She didn’t want anything to risk Aliana’s life. Not while she couldn’t fight back.

But at the same time, sucking up to these people felt wrong somehow. She couldn’t quite pinpoint why, but she-

And then it hit her. Waiting to make people's lives better was supposed to wait until after the war. But the Republic had already had a war specifically for the purpose of making people's lives better. The Republic was brand new, and it was already more corrupt than Hutt Space. If they didn't do it after stopping the Empire, why should she believe it would happen after this war?

"...No," Rey said quietly. "No, the Republic won't make things better. Not if everything just goes back to the way it was. War is over, peace in the galaxy, the Jedi have returned... I won't do that Leia. I'm going into the Senate Tower as myself. Not some idea of the Republic's perfect Jedi. I don't want to *ever* be the Republic's perfect Jedi. I told Skywalker I would never be a Jedi like him. It's just me. Rey. If the Republic won't help us just because I have non-standard training or because our ally is a Sith, then the Republic is not an ally I want to have."

"And what are you going to do when they decide that you and Aliana are the enemy?" Leia asked. "What are you going to tell the rest of the Resistance when they find out they've been branded as enemies as well? They signed on to help save the Republic, not to be gunned down by it for being your accomplices."

"Leia, you say that Aliana being a Sith will brand me as the enemy and that I have to be a Jedi," Rey said, a glare growing on her face, "But the Supreme Leader of the First Order is *also* a Jedi. There's no way the Republic doesn't know this by now. If a Jedi can be fighting against the Republic and nobody bats an eye, who's to say a Sith can't help save it? If the Senate really is that narrow minded, that stupid, and THAT paranoid, then there's really only one thing *to* do.

To make her point, she twisted her wrist and one of the mirrors on the speeder twisted and broke off.

"Call for a snap election."

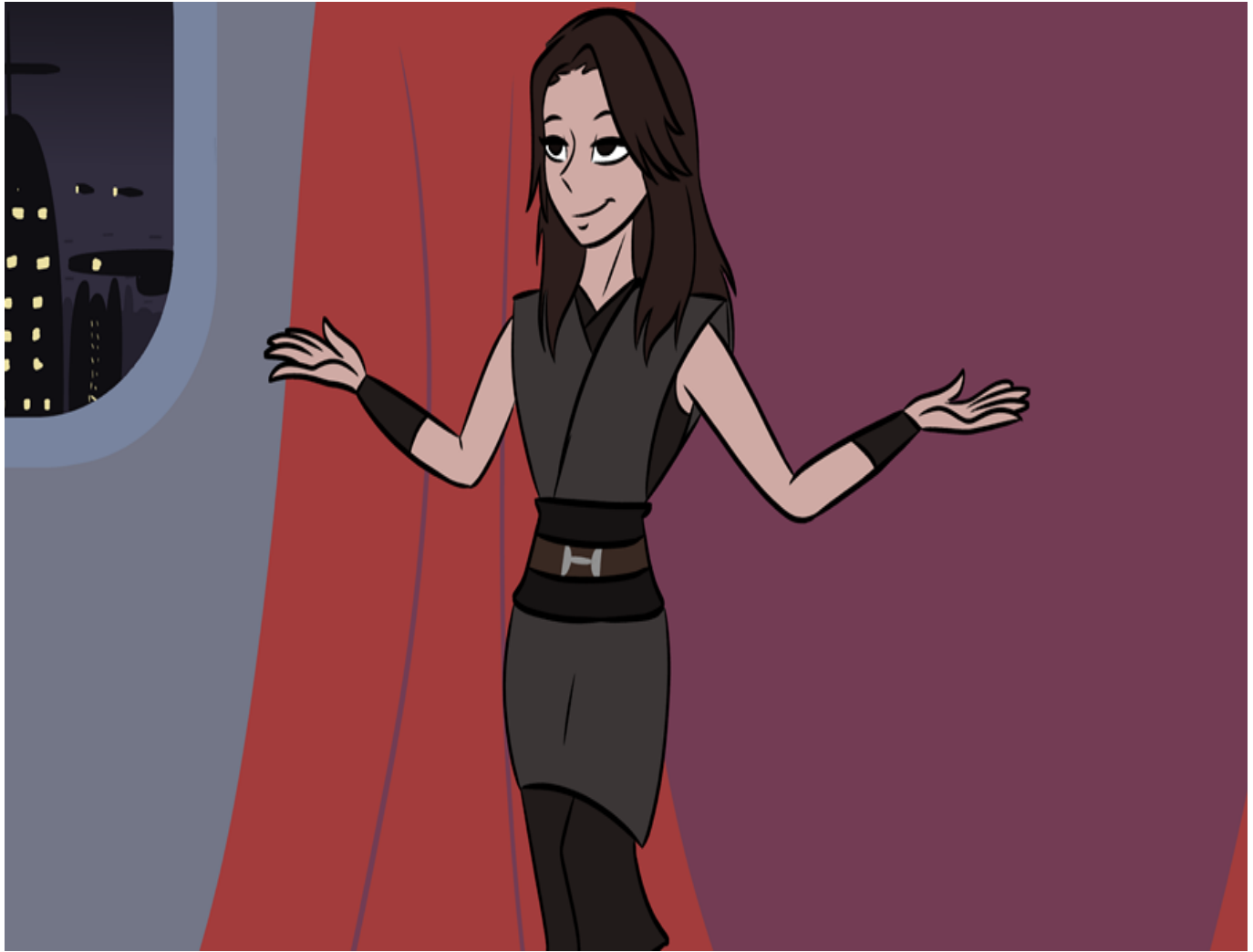
Leia groaned and rested her face in an open palm. "You taught her that didn't you?" she asked, not even having to look up to convey that she was talking to Amilyn.

"Hey, don't look at me!" Amilyn said, making no effort to hide her smile. "Rey's a quick learner, she might have picked that up from a brochure or something."

"Actually it was in Mayrik's holorecordings," Rey smirked.

Rey had truly taken the reigns on Leia's plans for her. Her resolve wouldn't be shaken as they walked into the tailor's and Rey immediately started talking over her. Instead of the traditional, white Jedi robes, the tailor had fitted her with a set of robes in various shades of dark brown. A light, sleeveless tunic. A pair of bracers. A vest going over her tunic and hanging low over a set of loose cloth pants, and a pair of dark leather boots. Her belt had been affixed over the vest to hold it closed and give her easy access to her lightsabers.

All in all, it was a much simpler design than the elaborate cloth tunic that Leia had dressed her in before leaving for Ahch To. As Rey stepped out of the fitting room and toward Leia and Amilyn, she reached up and pulled her hair out of it's bun, letting it fall freely over her shoulders.



“What do you think?” she asked.

“...I’m terrified the ghost of my father is going to appear and ask for his look back,” Leia said, hanging her head.

Behind her, a Force Ghost that Rey didn’t recognize, a tall man with messy hair and a scar over his eye, gave Rey a thumbs up and nodded.

“...You look lovely Rey,” Amilyn said with a smile. “Very you.”

“Well somebody’s supportive,” Rey smiled as she clipped her lightsabers to her belt. “Alie refused to hide who she was, and I’m not about to start.”

“Well let’s hope the Senate appreciates your honesty,” Amilyn said. “We should head back to the suite and get some rest. We have a big day ahead of us.”

Rey nodded. As Amilyn got up to leave, Leia put a hand on Rey’s shoulder and pulled her to wait. “Hold on Rey,” she whispered. “I need a minute.”

Rey sighed, knowing what was coming. As soon as Amilyn was outside, Leia finally spoke.

“Rey, I know how you feel about the Republic. Believe me, I do too sometimes,” Leia urged. “But is this really the best way to express that? Showing spite to the Senate just because you can?”

“Leia, if they’d declare me and Alie the enemy now, they’d do it after the war is over,” Rey urged. “I can’t carry on with the promise to Alie that we’ll live a peaceful life when this is all over knowing that it might actually be a lie. I have to know *now*. If the Republic is going to give up fighting the First Order because of that, then that only proves the Republic isn’t worth saving.”

Leia wanted to argue, but she knew that Rey wasn’t going to budge on this. She was perhaps the most stubborn woman she ever met, apart from herself. So she didn’t argue further. She simply let out a single tired sigh. “...Alright then,” Leia said. “If that’s how it has to be.”

“Thank you,” Rey smiled, laying a hand on Leia’s shoulder.

As Rey turned to leave, Leia cast a dark glare toward her. She’d been troubled by Rey’s behavior before, but now things were getting out of hand. If things didn’t stop soon, Rey might very well end up like her son.

Or her father.

Maybe, just maybe, what Rey needed was a harsh reality check. Of just how hostile the galaxy would be to her if she continued to sabotage her own reputation like this. Both in how she behaved, and the company she kept.

While Leia and Holdo had gone to the suite they’d rented, Rey was adamant about returning to the Fury and sleeping there. Neither of them argued and she was soon heading back into the hangar, only to find a handful of Republic officials standing around the docking ramp with blaster rifles and datapads. She got a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach as she broke into a run toward them.

“Excuse me? What’s going on here?” Rey asked.

“Is this your ship, ma’am?” one of the officers asked.

“Yes it is,” Rey nodded, her shoulders squared and tense as she looked around at the officials that stood before her. “What is the problem here?”

“The problem is the ID signature,” the officer explained. “It’s a little disturbing that a ship registered to a ‘Darth Amorosa’ is so deep in Republic Space. You care to explain yourself, *Lord Amorosa*?”

Rey’s jaw clenched as she frantically went over her options. If she told them that she wasn’t Darth Amorosa, that could lead to them apprehending Aliana... or worse. Even if she explained the situation as honestly as she could, the Republic she was exposed to wouldn’t think twice about killing a comatose woman if they knew she was Sith. If she told them that she was Darth Amorosa, then Aliana would be spared any immediate danger, but Rey herself would still face the potential problem of fighting off the entire Republic.

“...Why do I have to explain myself?” she asked, raising an eyebrow. “So my ID signature carries an unusual name. What’s the issue here?” She decided to play dumb, hoping she could maneuver the conversation in some way. “Have I committed a crime?”

“The problem is that the Republic has effectively banned the practice of the Sith religion,” The officer explained. “Any evidence of such practices is grounds for immediate apprehension. Having

an ID signature by the name of Darth is something that warrants investigation. I'm sure you wouldn't mind if we had a look around?"

"Actually yes, I *would* mind," Rey snapped, standing on the ramp and blocking their way. She couldn't let them inside. If they would Aliana... if they found her Sith holocrons... "You have no grounds to search my ship other than a strange name."

"Those dark clothes and lightsabers on your belt are rather suspicious as well," the officer continued. "Pretty interesting getup for someone who doesn't consider themselves a Darth."

"I'm a Jedi, now back off," Rey glared. "I'm not in the mood for this garbage, and I crushed an AT-AT last month."

"Well you certainly don't sound like a Jedi," the officer said shaking his head. "Alright, I'm going to have to ask you to step aside so that we can search your ship."

Several rifles were lifted toward her, and Rey gave a casual wave of her hand and they were wrenched from their wielders' grips and thrown to opposite ends of the hangar. "You're not getting on my ship. And as the last remaining Jedi, *I'll* decide what a Jedi sounds like. Not you."

The officer tensed considerably after seeing how casually his and his men's armaments were tossed aside. Instinctively he reached for his comm unit and spoke into it.

"This is security chief Tenneck! I need ba-" the device suddenly cracked and sparked against his face, causing him to drop it reflexively. The comm had been destroyed. His eyes lifted from the broken unit to Rey who was visibly out of patience.

"...We'll be back with that warrant, *Jedi*." He said before turning to leave the hanger, motioning for his men to follow.

As soon as they were gone, Rey turned and boarded the ship, slamming the door shut behind her. This was bad. Apparently being Sith was outlawed on Coruscant? She hadn't been expecting that little piece of information.

"2V!" she called out as she stepped onto the flight deck, "Get out here, we have a problem!"

"What seems to be the problem, Miss Rey?" 2V asked quizzically as he stepped from the cockpit. "If it's about the Porg's dietary needs, I assure you I've been providing him with optimal nutrition for a creature his size and age."

"No, we're on Coruscant and the Republic's been sniffing around. They know the ship belongs to a Sith Lord," Rey explained.

2V seemed to stop for a moment, his optics blinking as if he was processing this information.

"My apologies Miss Rey, but this situation is not in my programming. In fact, had I known the ship was entering Republic Space, I would have done this." Almost instantly the entire ship was alight with red lights and blaring alarms. Rey clapped her hands over her ears and yelled at 2V to stop, and the alarm went silent as quickly as it had started.

"My apologies, Miss Rey. But there are strict instructions to never take the *Fury* into Republic space for this very reason."

“Well we ARE in Republic space! That can’t be helped right now!” Rey snapped harshly.

“Then we must leave as quickly as possible,” 2V replied.

“We can’t, Leia and Holdo are in the city and we have business here with the Senate,” Rey urged. “There’s got to be some way around this!”

“Miss Rey, why on earth would you consider the Republic to be your allies while you continue to fraternize with Miss Alie?” 2V asked curiously. “Fraternizing with a Sith is a capital crime in the New Republic.”

“I... Well, no one told me that!” Rey said indignantly. “Come on, 2V! All the years you spent serving Aliana’s family, there had to be a situation like this one! What happened when one of her ancestors was stuck in Republic space? What was the protocol?”

“Miss Rey, every time the Beniko family has gone into Republic or Imperial space, the reigning matriarch of the family has been killed,” 2V explained. “Vestris, Safik, Alora and Mayrik all met this exact fate.”

“Kriffing hell!” Rey cursed, her fingers digging into her skull. “This is bad! Why did I bring her here!?”

“Because the Resistance base doesn’t yet possess the necessary medi-”

“That was a rhetorical question, 2V!” Rey interrupted.

“Well the first thing you must do is prevent the continued investigation of the Fury,” 2V explained. “Given the situation, perhaps it is best to come clean to the Senate about everything. If they’re in a good mood, they may perhaps show leniency. Otherwise you will have to fight your way off the planet. I’d say you have nothing to lose and everything to gain.”

Rey groaned in frustration, all but slamming her back against a cold durasteel wall before sliding slowly to the floor. “...If I do that, they could kill Aliana before I can even get back to the ship,” she whispered. Her breath hitched as a single sob caught in her throat.

“Then perhaps you should contact the Senate Tower from the holoterminal, Miss Rey,” 2V said.

Rey huffed out a bitter laugh. “...Yeah, appeal to the Senate via transmission. That’s very brave,” she said sarcastically. Her head slumped down, her forehead resting against her knees as her arms wrapped around her legs.

“Pardon my speaking out of turn, Miss Rey. But Miss Alie will most certainly die if you continue sitting here feeling sorry for yourself,” 2V said as he knelt down in front of her.

“...Right,” Rey mumbled as she rose back to her feet, rubbing her eyes with two fingers. “Force, help me. I’m so tired.” In that moment she was seriously considering just taking the Fury and running. Just leave everyone else to figure out the war. Find a place for her and Alie to lay low and live happily and quietly for the rest of their days.

...But she couldn’t run. She swore to herself she’d be a better Jedi than Luke.

She hurried over to the holoterminal and punched in the coordinates for the Senate Tower. “Who are the Senators that might be friendly to us?”

"I believe Senator Marek might be," 2V explained. "He was once an assassin for Darth Vader before becoming a Jedi."

"...Starkiller?" Rey asked, recognizing that descriptor from one of Mayrik's journal entries. Apparently he was a Senator. "...Well, alright then. See if you can reach him."

2V took the control for the holoterminal and input Starkiller's frequency. After a few seconds, a very tired looking man answered.

"Hello? This is Senator Marek, who is this?" he grumbled.

"Senator Marek? My name is Rey," Rey explained. "I'm with the Resistance and the Jedi Order, and I've got a situation down in the Spaceport."

"The Resistance?" Marek asked before sighing. "Ah, that's right. Leia is appealing at the tower tomorrow. ...Still, I suppose I can't turn away from a Jedi in need. How can I help you, Rey?"

"Alright... here's the thing." Rey took a deep breath and tried to calm her nerves. "I'm flying a ship that belongs to a Sith Lord, and the ID signatures have made security panic and they want to search the ship."

"...Alright..." he said as his eyes turned to a cup of caff that he began stirring. "So long as you explained that the ship didn't originally belong to you, they won't charge you for anything that they confiscate."

"That's the problem. I need them to NOT search the ship," Rey said anxiously. "The ship doesn't even belong to me now. It still belongs to the Sith in question."

"Yes, but I just told you. You won't be charged for anything they confiscate," Marek explained, his voice gruff with annoyance. "Just tell them you stole the ship from a Sith for whatever reason. ...Actually, why did you steal a Sith ship?"

"I didn't steal it. The Sith is *on* the ship as we speak," Rey explained. "She's comatose."

Marek's eyes widened at the revelation as he slowly put his caff down. "...Okay, why is the Sith comatose on your ship? And why do you not want security to apprehend her?"

"She was injured on the *Supremacy* while fighting the First Order. She took Kylo Ren's lightsaber to her abdomen," Rey explained.

"Yes, but she's Sith," Marek stressed, feeling his patience begin to wane. "Dark Side users killing each other isn't anything new. Why are you trying to keep this one away from Republic security?"

"Because they'll kill her if they get near her!" Rey exclaimed.

"But why is that important?!" Marek asked loudly.

"BECAUSE SHE'S MY LOVER!" Rey snapped.

Marek blinked. "...Come again?"

Rey winced, wanting to kick herself for her panicked outburst. "...She's my lover," she repeated. "She was injured aboard the *Supremacy* saving my life. Before that, she was the most thoughtful,

kind and gentle soul that I know. She means everything to me and I want nothing more than to keep her safe. I brought her here because I had no other choice, but I need help keeping the Republic from destroying her. Please.”

Marek was quiet for a second before he set his caff down. “Leia doesn’t give me the easy ones, does she?” he whistled as he put his forehead in his hand. “Okay... so you’re in a bind. Harboursing a Sith. Fraternizing with a Sith. Smuggling Sith artifacts. Are you two married? I feel like I should know that.”

“..Um... well, no,” Rey shook her head. “Not yet, at least. I mean, I wouldn’t be against the idea. Far from it in fact! I would honestly love to be married to Aliana. I admit I’ve thought about it more than once. The life we’d have together after the war. Maybe settle down on a remote planet with lots of wildlife an-”

“Yeah, that’s great,” Marek interrupted. “Point is, you’re in a lot of trouble.”

“Yeah, I know. I called asking for help getting out of it!” Rey huffed.

“Well I’m not sure you can,” Marek shrugged. “You’d need to pull a lot of... wait, you said fighting Kylo Ren? On the Supremacy? What about Snoke?” he asked, his eyes lighting up with realization.

“Sno- Oh! Yeah, we killed him,” Rey said. “Kylo Ren took control after that, but trust me, he’s no match for either of us. He only wounded Aliana because she left herself open when she saved me.”

“Aliana?” Marek asked.

“That’s her name.”

“...I see,” Marek said, stroking his chin. “Such an act could put her in a favorable position for a pardon by the Senate. We would still need more, though. Has she done anything else that would have benefited the Republic?”

“Did Leia tell you about what Aliana did on Starkiller Ba- um, on Ilum?” Rey asked.

“No? Why, was she there?” Marek asked.

“Starkiller Base was about to fire on the Hosnian system while the Republic was gathered there,” Rey explained. “In fact, it actually fired. But Aliana held the beam back with the Force to give the Resistance a few more seconds to destroy the base. She saved billions of lives.”

Marek’s eyes widened further than looked humanly possible. “...That’s quite the claim,” he said quietly. “...However, I know well enough that the Force is capable of... outlandish things. As improbable as it is, stopping a beam of that magnitude is still well within the realm of possibility. Would you and Leia be willing to validate that claim to the Senate?”

“I can do better than that. I have the logs from the Falcon to prove it,” Rey nodded as she punched in a few buttons and sent the files over to Marek. “The Falcon recorded damn near everything that happened around it before it was destroyed.”

“Is that right?” Marek pulled something up that remained out of frame from his transmission, as he watched the recording sent to him his expression shifted into one of sheer amazement. “Well, I’ll

be. It looks like you weren't bluffing."

"She was almost killed fighting the First Order. Three times," Rey said, her voice becoming desperate. "I can't let anything else happen to her. She has to stay safe. I..." her voice cracked as she started choking up.

Marek's attention shifted back to Rey but his look of wonder did not cease or even fade. "You really do care for her don't you?" he asked, his tone much softer than it had been the majority of the conversation.

"I love her. More than anything," Rey said quietly, clapping a hand over her mouth. "I can't let the Republic kill her..."

"...A Jedi and a Sith in love. I have officially seen everything," Marek said, shaking his head. "Alright. I'll be sure to meet with you and Leia tomorrow before the Senate meets. We can find a way to work... Aliana's pardon in with your request for aid. Until then I can try and pull some strings to keep you two safe for the night."

"Thank you, Senator. Thank you so much, I don't know how I can ever repay you," Rey whispered.

"Winning the war would be nice," the old man said with a wry smile. "Hopefully we can make that a little easier for you, too."

"It's a deal," Rey smiled as she cut the transmission. She breathed a heavy sigh of relief as she slumped down onto the floor. She felt like her heart was about to burst from the anxiety. In the span of twenty minutes, she's very nearly risked losing Aliana *again*. Any more scares like this and she might just have a stroke.

"2V," she asked, her voice shaking. "Does Aliana get into these situations a lot?"

"Once every four months usually," 2V explained. "However, her life threatening situations have increased in frequency by twenty seven hundred percent since she landed on Jakku seven months ago."

"Of course they have," Rey groaned. It seemed as though her worrying about Aliana's safety would very likely become the norm in their relationship. Especially after the Supremacy.

But it was worth it. Aliana was always worth it.

Force Sensitive Bacteria Found in the Blood

Leia was not happy with Rey, though she could hardly be angry at her for the circumstances. She hadn't expected Coruscant security to lose their minds over the Fury's ID signatures, and she was at least happy Rey defused the situation without killing anyone. A body count on Coruscant was not something any of them wanted to have. Still, she wasn't happy that the Senate now knew everything.

It complicated things way too much for her liking.

She had hoped to present the truth of Aliana at the meeting. Allow their testimonies for the Sith ease the senators into accepting her and the Resistance as allies. As it stood, their perception was already colored by these events which only made the situation more difficult.

A gentle, comforting hand found its place on Leia's shoulder, prompting her to turn and look at Amilyn.

"It's going to be okay," Amilyn said, her voice soft and reassuring. "We avoided bloodshed and we still have time to make our case to the Senate. Things aren't all bad."

"That's not what I'm worried about," Leia shook her head. "If things don't go well... what is Rey going to do? If the Republic threatens Aliana, we'll lose both of them as allies. And we might gain them as enemies."

Amilyn winced at the thought. Losing Rey and Aliana's support would be bad enough. Making them their foes would be the worst possible outcome and not a thought she enjoyed dwelling on. "...We just have to make sure the Senate doesn't say anything stupid. A tall order, but we've managed crazier feats."

"Let's just hope it doesn't blow up in our faces."

As they got off the speeder to the Senate tower, they saw Galen Marek get out of his own with Rey in tow. Rey looked like she was on the verge of a panic attack, while Galen just seemed annoyed at having to get up earlier than usual. They met at the entrance and Leia could tell that Rey had spent the morning crying.

"I see you've already met our Jedi," Leia smiled weakly.

"She sought me out," the old man said plainly as he glanced back at Rey. "I'll admit... she's interesting. Never met a Jedi who called me in the dead of night to plead for the life of a Sith. Your Resistance keeps some odd company."

Rey glared at the back of Galen's head, but Leia beat her to the punch. "Eh, Rey and Aliana have been through a lot. Please don't belittle them."

Rey's glare softened and she turned a surprised but thankful look to Leia.

"Oh I'm far from judging," Galen clarified. "I'll admit I'm hardly one to talk about peculiar backgrounds. I just hope my fellow senators will be as understanding. You have a hell of a pitch to make."

"I know, but we've done crazy things before," Leia smiled as she gestured for Galen to step inside.

The four of them were led by a guard to the Senate chambers, as pristine and regal looking as the days of the Old Republic. But there was something instantly noticeable. More than half the platforms surrounding the Chancellor's podium were empty, indicating how much smaller the New Republic was. As the guards led them onto a platform, Rey took a deep breath and tried to calm her nerves. As far as she was concerned, she was deep in hostile territory and at the mercy of the Senate.

She didn't like being at *anybody's* mercy.

The group filed into one of the empty platforms. Marek pressed a small series of buttons, allowing it to activate and float closer to the other senators.

"Onto the next matter," the Chancellor said, silencing the hush whispers throughout the room. "General Organa. You have come to Coruscant to once again appeal to the Senate to offer Official Republic aid to the Resistance. Is this correct?"

"It is," Leia said, her tone of voice firm but professional. "And to help make my case, I have brought the last Jedi remaining in the Galaxy."

Rey nervously stepped forward and glanced around the room, unsure of who to focus on.

Chancellor Villecham looked down at her suspiciously before continuing. "And where is Skywalker? I thought he was the last Jedi? Is this his apprentice?"

Before Leia could answer, Rey spoke up.

"Luke Skywalker is dead, Chancellor," she said. "And no, I'm not his apprentice."

A round of whispered shock echoed throughout the nearly hollow chamber around them.

"And yet you claim to be a Jedi?" Villecham asked. "Arriving to Coruscant in a Sith warship and sporting the garments of one such individual?"

"Chancellor, many Jedi wore darker robes," Rey frowned. "And yes, I claim to be a Jedi. I've studied the Jedi teachings for six months now, and I've fought off several of the First Order's Knights. The Sith warship in question had been a valuable asset against the First Order, and contains the entire Old Republic Jedi archives in its databanks. Without it, I couldn't call myself a Jedi."

The Chancellor furrowed his brow. "And what else resides in that warship? The identification reads that it belongs to a Darth Amorosa. Is she aboard?"

"Yes, but she is no threat," Amilyn replied, stepping forward beside Rey. "She is in a medically induced coma after sustaining serious injuries fighting against the First Order."

There was a number of hushed whispers surrounding the Senate chamber.

"And how exactly did the Resistance come to ally with the Sith?" the Chancellor demanded, leaning forward on his podium.

"A simple matter of uniting against a common enemy," Leia explained. "While her use of the Dark Side would make her a potential Ally to the First Order, her way of life is incompatible with their narrow beliefs."

"And how exactly does her way of life conflict with the First Order?" Villecham pressed.

"On the surface, she doesn't seem to be interested in power for power's sake. She rejects the bloodline fixation the First Order has, and everything from her complexion to her sexuality are things the First Order finds to be profane."

The Senate was momentarily silenced at that.

"And how can you be certain she won't turn around and become an enemy once the First Order has been dealt with?" the Chancellor demanded. "How are you certain you aren't just defeating her rivals?"

"Because I know her," Rey said, a growing indigmance betraying the detached tone she aimed for. "She is not interested in conquest. Merely survival. When the First Order is defeated, she will cause no harm to the Republic so long as you cause no harm to her. She had already gone above and beyond the call of duty in this war! The entire Hosnian system owes her their lives!"

"And how is that?"

"When Starkiller Base targeted the Hosnian system, the Resistance went in to destroy it before it could fire," Rey explained. "But we were too late. The weapon *did* fire. But Ali... Amorosa held the beam back with the Force to give our pilots the few extra seconds they needed in order to cripple the weapon."

"That is quite the claim. Have you any proof of this?" The Chancellor asked, unconvinced.

Rey pulled a data Crystal from her sash and placed it inside the terminal on their platform. The holoprojector illuminated before them and revealed a snowy tundra surrounding the barrel of the Starkiller weapon. The barrel burned with red hot energy for a moment before shooting a concentrated beam of destructive power. However, the blast did not breach the atmosphere of the planet, but rather hung there. It writhed and seethed with restrained power but remained where it was. A moment later the powerful energy simply dispersed harmlessly as blooms of fire began bursting around it, the result of Poe's squadron laying fire on the weapon.

The playback ended, leaving the entire room in stunned silence. "At that time, there was only one Force wielder powerful enough to accomplish such a thing. Darth Amorosa."

The Chancellor turned to one of his aides and whispered to him before looking back at the four of them. "Senator Marek, what do you think of this mess?"

Galen stood up and straightened his jacket. "Honestly Chancellor, there is precedent for Sith to perform extremely outlandish feats with the Force. Under Vader's tutelage, I was able to rip a Star Destroyer out of the sky. The Dark Side is a volatile side of the Force, and a Sith actively fighting against the First Order is a lethal blow to their entire operation. Unfortunately I only have Miss... Rey, what's your last name?" He added quietly as he turned to Rey.

"...I don't have one," she said almost sheepishly. "I was a slave living on my own most of my life."

Galen was quiet for a moment before returning his attention to the Chancellor. "Unfortunately I only have Miss... Beniko's word for Amorosa's temperament. As she's comatose, I can't really speak to her myself."

Rey blinked. Did Marek give Rey Aliana's last name? Why? And why did that make her heart flutter ever so slightly.

She needed a moment to center herself once more before she spoke again. "...I am willing to speak truthfully on Amorosa's behalf. She is a valuable ally and a noble person. She will see the First Order end and the Republic thrive so long as you don't seem to cause her harm."

"And how do you know what Amorosa's plans for after the war even are?" the Chancellor asked. "The Sith aren't known to be up front about their agenda."

"Amorosa, as all the Sith in her line, are more concerned with survival. Not conquest." Rey's brow furrowed as she felt she was talking in circles now. The Chancellors continuing difficulty and pedantic words began to grate on her patience. "Whatever plans she has after the war will not bring harm to the Republic so long as the Republic does not seem to harm her. She has committed no crimes against the Republic or it's people and has only worked to destroy it's enemies."

"Understand Miss Beniko that you're putting us in a very precarious position. You want us to believe that the Sith returning is not something we need to worry about just because you and General Organa vouch for her. You might be right, but you might also be fooled," the Chancellor explained. "And you're asking us to put your word against historical precedent."

Rey's fist clenched tightly. Her eyes narrowed at the Chancellor as her anger began to boil. "And what exactly do you fear that Amorosa will do?" Rey asked, her words sharp. "The First Order is already banging down your door. There is corruption rampant in the streets beneath our very feet. And from what I can gather, their leaders are more comfortable judging by fear than reason. You worry about what threat Amorosa will pose when the First Order is defeated, but if the Republic doesn't survive to see that day then the point is completely moot. Amorosa is not a shady politician making a power grab. She is a woman who is concerned with her well-being as well as those of the people she cares about. You would sooner judge her by the actions of other Sith than by the fact that she's already saved the Republic?"

The Chancellor fell silent as he seemed to be mulling over Rey's words. It was at that point when another Senator's podium came forward and hovered beside Rey's.

"Chancellor, if I may? Perhaps it would be prudent to return to this matter after the war is over and grant Amorosa a temporary pardon so long as she remains out of Republic Space?" the Senator suggested.

Villecham perked up and glanced around the Senate chambers. "If there are no objections?"

Everyone was quiet.

"Very well. Amorosa is granted a temporary pardon and is ordered to remain out of Republic space. We'll return to this matter when the war is over and decide her fate then," Villecham nodded as he turned to Rey. "Consider this an opportunity to prove your case, Miss Beniko."

Rey suppressed a satisfied grin and bowed as graciously as her insincerity could manage. "I thank the Senate and the Republic for their compassion," she said.

“Very well. Now, for the matter of Resistance aid. I’m willing to provide the resources to build a proper base on Odessen and a small handful of ships. But that is all I can do at the moment,” Villecham explained. “With the First Order declaring open war, there’s no need to keep up appearances anymore.”

"Any aid at all will be greatly appreciated," Leia responded. "The Resistance remains loyal to the Republic. Receiving your aid will boost morale considerably."

“Alright. Now please, take your Sith and your... Jedi I suppose, and leave Coruscant immediately,” Villecham sighed as he waved his hand, dismissing them. “Don’t make me regret this, Miss Beniko.”

The four of them said nothing as they retreated from the Senate chambers. They remained silent all the way to the hangar before Rey finally dared breathe a sigh of relief. “I can’t believe we managed that...” she said as she extended the ramp for the Fury.

“You kept yourself under control a lot better than I thought you would,” Galen nodded. “I’m impressed. Villecham has a habit of trying to provoke people. He was trying to make you lose your cool. He thought you were Amorosa’s apprentice.”

"...Well she did have a hand in my training, so I guess he's not too far off," Rey admitted. "Still, he's a proper bastard."

She took a few steps up the ramp before turning to look back at the other three. "I'll prep the Fury for takeoff."

Leia and Amilyn nodded while Galen stepped forward.

“I’m sorry about what I did with your name, Rey,” he said. “I had to give the Senate *something* .”

“It’s alright, I understand,” Rey nodded, not turning around as she stepped onto the Fury.

As soon as she was on the flight deck, she made a beeline right for her quarters. She had to see her before doing anything else. As she opened the door and glanced at where Aliana was lying, she froze and her heart stopped dead in her chest.

She was gone.

Almost immediately, panic began setting in as she glanced around the room. The instruments were still there, but they were completely disconnected. It looked like Aliana had been carried out or something. She immediately turned and bolted onto the flight deck to find 2V when she collided with something hard and stumbled. She nearly fell on her face, but felt an arm wrap around her and hold her steady.

“Whoa!” Aliana said as she pulled Rey to her feet. “Careful, sweetheart. You almost broke your nose.”

Rey's eyes were wide as saucers. Her breath caught in her throat. She was frozen in place. Words felt just beyond her reach, so she simply stood there, gawking at Aliana in disbelief.

"Alie...", she managed, her voice already cracking. "...You're awake."

"Yup," Aliana replied with an easy, lopsided grin. "2V said it's been two months and that I was ready to wake up. Thought I'd walk around see how I'm feeling. Still stiff and sore but it's not so bad. I'm almost surprised you didn't knock me over when you- ...Rey, are you crying?"

Rey didn't answer, instead she pulled herself forward and wrapped Aliana in a tight hug. Her shoulders shook hard as she began weeping against the Sith's shoulder.

Aliana winced as Rey squeezed down on her midsection, right on her lightsaber wound. But she gingerly wrapped her arms around Rey's shoulders and held her as she cried. The pain wasn't too bad. Only a little worse than being punched in the stomach. "Rey... that hurts... could you loosen your grip a little?"

"Oh my God! I'm sorry!" Rey said pulling away while still keeping her hold on Aliana. Her reddened eyes were drenched in concern as well as tears as she looked her over. "Are you okay?"

"I'm a little worse for wear, but my stomach is really sensitive," Aliana gasped as she clutched her midsection. "Just... be careful with your bear hugs, okay?"

"Okay," Rey said softly. She looked up from Aliana's midsection to her face. By the stars, she was still so beautiful. Rey found herself acting on sheer instinct as she cupped Aliana's face in her hands and pulled her forward for a kiss. Her lips still tasted of cinnamon. Tasting it again after so long brought a choked sob out of her throat. "I missed you so much," she whimpered.

"I'm glad to hear that," Aliana smiled as she wrapped her arms around Rey's shoulders and buried her nose into her neck. She took in Rey's earthy scent and whimpered quietly as her fingers dug into her vest. "You look really pretty."

Rey giggles bashfully, reaching to tuck a stray lock of hair behind her ear. "Thank you," she whispered. "I'm glad you like it. I... wanted to make an impression to the Senate today."

Aliana raised an eyebrow as she pulled back to look at her. "The Senate? You went to Coruscant?"

Rey blinked before her eyes widened again. Aliana didn't know where they were currently. Biting her lip nervously, she slid her hands onto the other woman's shoulders, kneading them reassuringly. "...Ok, Alie... don't freak out... but we're on Coruscant right now."

Aliana's hands gripped Rey's arms tightly as her eyes widened. "Rey... why did you bring me to Coruscant?" she asked nervously, already freaking out internally.

"The base back on Odessen still doesn't have a proper medical bay. They couldn't monitor you properly. The Fury was the safest place to keep you." Rey continued to gently rub Aliana's shoulders, trying to ease the tension she was no doubt feeling.

"Please... can we just go?" Aliana asked, breathing heavily as she clung to Rey's arms. "Whatever else can wait, can we just get off this planet?"

"We were just about to," Rey reassured her, not letting her go. "We just need Leia and Holdo on board, then we can launch."

Aliana breathed a sigh of relief as the Fury jumped into Hyperspace and she could finally relax. She sidled closer to Rey and wrapped her arms around her midsection, snuggling into the Jedi's

chest as she tried to calm her nerves. She'd only just woken up and she'd already had a violent scare.

"Never a dull moment with you, is it?" she laughed nervously as she clutched Rey tighter.

"I'm sorry I gave you such a fright," Rey said softly as she strokes Aliana's unruly hair. Two months in a coma had given her *horrible* bedhead. She looked down at the woman who was holding her so close, almost fearful that Rey would vanish if she loosened her grip. As she savored the feeling of being able to hold Aliana again, her mind couldn't help but wander to all she had thought about while they were apart. The ways she hurt this poor woman who had only ever loved her. "...I'm sorry for so much more too," she said wistfully.

Aliana lifted her head and looked at Rey curiously. "What do you mean?" She leaned forward and kissed Rey's cheek before laying her head on her shoulder. "What more is there?"

"The way I nearly got us both killed after Starkiller base," Rey answered grimly, finding herself unable to meet Aliana's eyes. "I was so angry that I all but put a blaster to your head and forced you to confess something you weren't ready to confess. I was stupid and spiteful and I lashed out at you." Her forefinger began tracing circles on Aliana's forearm. "When I haven't been actively hurting you, I've thought poorly of you. Almost our entire time on Ahch To I accepted your help and care while still refusing to trust you. Even after everything... after all you've done for me, my mind kept coming back to the idea that you would betray me. I held onto that anger for so long. Longer than I realized. It wasn't fair to you." Her eyes began to sting with tears again. She held them back. She needed to say this without breaking down. "You're the most wonderful person I ever met and I barely appreciated it. I'm so sorry Alie. You deserve better than what I've done to you."

Aliana was quiet. The fact that Rey had all but threatened to kill her that night on the Falcon hadn't been lost on her. In fact, she'd been dwelling on it for a long time. But she was so determined to earn Rey's trust back that she hadn't so much as brought it up at all, fearing Rey would just throw her dishonesty back in her face. And then when things started going better and Rey confessed to being in love with her, she hadn't wanted to potentially ruin that. So she'd put it in the back of her mind.

Hearing Rey having come to that realization herself, hearing her apologize, made Aliana's heart well up. She'd hoped Rey hadn't intended to do that to her, hoped that it had been a poor impulse. And hearing that she'd been right made her entire body relax. Even more than that, hearing Rey apologize for all the times she was friendly to her only when she needed something or it suited her... it felt like a huge weight had been lifted off her shoulders. In truth that had never really stopped after they patched things up, Rey continued to ask more from her than she was willing to give in return. She wasn't stupid, she knew their relationship wasn't healthy. But... she wanted it to be.

"...Thank you," Aliana whispered. "Rey, that... that means so much to hear from you. I almost can't believe I'm still awake. I... thank you so much." She buried her face in Rey's neck as her eyes started to sting with tears.

Rey finally let the tears fall down her cheek as she clung to Aliana, though was decidedly more careful about possibly upsetting her still healing wounds. "Things will be different," Rey cooed softly into Aliana's hair. "I will never hurt you like that again. I won't take from you without giving ever again. I promise."

Aliana started to cry softly as she clung tightly to Rey's shoulders. "I love you. I love you so much. Thank you, I really want things to be better. I don't want to lose you..."

"I don't want to lose you either," Rey said threading her fingers through some loose curls. "Things will be better. I'll give you all the care and effort I can. I love you so much, Alie. And I'm going to do a much better job of showing it, I promise."

Aliana pulled back from Rey's shoulder, her eyes wet with tears, and pulled Rey in by the neck of her vest and kissed her. She all but pushed Rey down onto the couch as she lost herself in the taste of Rey's lips, her fingers stroking her neck. Rey made a noise caught between a relieved sigh and a desperate groan. Her grip tightened on Aliana while still minding her injuries. She savored the taste of Aliana's kisses as their bodies laid flush against each other. Her ears listened intently at the noises she made as well as the way her fingers roamed over her. She rediscovered just how wonderful to her senses Aliana was, feeling bliss she hadn't felt in months.

Aliana briefly pulled back to kiss Rey's forehead and look down at her. "You have beautiful eyes, you know?"

Rey's lidded gaze fixed itself onto Aliana's own. Those beautiful crimson eyes that she had been longing to see again were staring down at her with all the warmth and love in the galaxy. They were enthralling. They were soothing. They made Rey feel like all would be well. What the Sith found so beautiful about her own eyes, she would never know, but her soft kind words were enough to tint Rey's cheeks a darker pink. "Well I'm glad you think so, because I only have eyes for you," she said with a lopsided smirk.

Aliana's cheeks flushed and she looked away from her. "That was the smoothest thing I've ever heard," she said, her hand drifting down to Rey's thigh as she leaned back in and kissed her again.

Rey's breath hitched at Aliana's touch before she moaned lightly against her lips. Her grip on the Sith slid down to her lower back as she returned the kiss with greater fervour. Aliana relaxed and laid against Rey as her tongue explored the Jedi's mouth, her hand running small circles around her thigh as her fingers inched inward.

Rey's eyes snapped open as she felt Aliana's touch reach closer to a place it's never been before. The first thing she noticed after that was a heat pooling in her belly in response. A natural response. That was good right? But she wasn't expecting this today. She wasn't prepared. The growing heat was soon accompanied by an uncomfortable twisting of uncertainty.

"Wait," Rey said softly, gently grabbing Aliana's forearm to still her hand.

Aliana lifted up slightly and raised an eyebrow, "What?"

"I..." A part of her wanted to just shut up and continue. To see where this would lead. But as wonderful as it felt, it didn't feel right. Not yet. Her hand trembled slightly at her own dilemma. She worried what would upset her more; denying her, or lying to her about wanting this. A relationship like this was still very new to her so she wasn't certain.

"...Not yet," she said meekly. "I-I'm not ready... sorry."

"Oh," Aliana said quietly, before she smiled and kissed Rey's cheek. "Okay. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to push you..."

Rey blinked, momentarily stunned at Aliana's response. "...You're not upset?" she asked.

"Of course not," Aliana smiled, cupping Rey's cheek and nuzzling the other.

Rey let out a small breath of relief as she leaned into Aliana's touch. That went better than her brief moment of anxiety had expected. "Thank you," Rey said, wrapping her arms back around Aliana's waist. "I know I said I would start giving more, and I will. I just... I'm not ready for *that* yet."

"Rey, it's fine. Really," Aliana said, looking concerned. Then it hit her. Rey had never been in a relationship before. She had no idea what she was doing. "Okay, sit up." Aliana gingerly got off of her and pulled her into an upright position. She took her hands and squeezed them, feeling Rey's anxiety ebb away in the Force. "Sweetie, giving in a relationship is one thing. But this is a different thing entirely," she explained to a confused-looking Rey. "Nobody is entitled to sex. Ever. If I tried to coerce you into it using your promise to give more, that'd be rape."

"Oh," Rey said, her eyes wide with surprise. She never thought about it that way. It made sense when Aliana explained it to her, as opposed to when her own conflicted emotions tried to make sense of her hesitance. Knowing she wasn't wrong for not being ready allowed the sudden weight she was feeling to be lifted. She smiled and rested her forehead against Aliana's and smiled. "Thank you, sweetheart," she said softly before giving her lips a soft kiss.

"You don't have to thank me. Someone has to tell you these things," Aliana smiled as she pulled Rey into a hug. "I was lucky I had my mother to tell me."

"That is ni-" Rey blinked as another realization dawned on her. "Oh! Right, I meant to tell you! Back on Odessen, we-" Rey paused as she pulled away slightly, placing her hands carefully but firmly on Aliana's shoulders. "Ok, first I need to make sure you're ready for another possible shock."

"Are you going to blow my mind, or electrocute me?" Aliana smirked. "Because you just said you weren't ready so I should warn you I'm kinda into that."

"Wha-?" Rey's face turned beet red as she sputtered. "Oh! You hush!" she huffed, trying to hide the smile threatening to creep on her face. "But yeah. It's the former. So back on Odessen, we recovered some old holorecordings from the Alliance base. They're from your mother."

Aliana's eyes widened as she gripped Rey's arms tightly, "You... you found recordings of my mother?" she asked, her voice cracking slightly.

"Yes... we learned quite a bit from them," Rey said, her lips pursing into a thin line. She wanted to make sure what she would say next did not convey any ideas of anger or disdain. What happened to her as a child was not Aliana's fault. "...Apparently we met before when I was five... when your mother took me to Jakku for Niima."

Aliana looked confused as she seemed to be racking her brain to try and connect what Rey had said to her own memories. Then, her eyes widened as she clapped a hand over her mouth. "Oh my god... the clingy five year old?! THAT WAS YOU?!"

Rey was taken aback slightly by how intense Aliana's reaction was, though her mind was stuck on a particular aspect. "...I was clingy?" she asked somewhat meekly.

“Mom was ferrying this kid across the Outer Rim for like... two weeks. She was crying when she came aboard and Mom was trying to keep the ship running so I just tried to calm her down. I think I sang her Mom’s lullaby. After a few hours she was practically clinging to me for the entire trip. Wouldn’t even sleep unless I was right next to her,” Aliana explained.

“...Well that certainly sounds like me,” Rey said, managing a wry laugh before her expression sobered again. “...I can’t say I remember any of it, but... I hope this doesn’t make things... weird between us. And I don’t want you to think I’m angry at you or your mother. I don’t like what she did, but I understand why she had to do it.”

“If it’s not weird for you, then it’s not weird for me,” Aliana smiled. “It’s kinda cute actually. That we’ve met before, and you were just as attached to me as you are now.”

“Well how can I not be? You’re wonderful,” Rey said as she wrapped her arms around Aliana once more. She sighed contently, feeling relief not just in talking to her lover again, but to be airing out all these strange thoughts and feelings she’d been having. “...And it turns out I have even more to thank you for than I thought,” she added, her face still nestled in the crook of Alie’s neck.

“What do you mean?” Aliana asked as she ran her fingers through Rey’s hair. It wasn’t often that Rey snuggled into her. Being the shorter one, Alie was usually in that position. But holding Rey felt nice.

“We recovered some more information when we tried to call in one of your favors from Niima,” Rey explained. “Turns out my parents were junk dealers who sold me for drinking money... and you killed them over it.”

“Those two dregs on Tatooine were your parents?!” Aliana balked. “Wow this galaxy is tiny. I uh... are you mad at me?”

Rey withdrew enough to look at Aliana and shake her head. “If I were still desperately clinging to the idea of who I wanted my parents to be, I would be made. But those bastards sold me, their own daughter, for booze. They deserve what you gave them. If anything, I’m thankful. My life would have been worse if I ever met those two again.”

“That was only a month after my mother was killed,” Aliana said, wringing her hands as she looked away. “Seeing two people hurl such derision at their own daughter, seeing them brag about selling her... I hated them so much. It was a mistake though. I could have gotten your location from them and gotten you off the planet sooner. But I just... I snapped.”

Rey tenderly stroked Aliana’s upper arm and gave her a soft smile. “Don’t feel bad. I could have gotten myself off of that planet years ago. I was able to hotwire a freighter by the time I was thirteen. I could have snuck onto Unkar Plutt’s ships and be out of there before anyone could have stopped me. But I stopped myself. Because I was still holding onto the hope that my family would come back for me. Regardless who put me there, I was on Jakku as long as I was because I chose to be.”

“Well... for what it’s worth...” Aliana said, cupping Rey’s cheek and looking at her with adoration. “Your family *did* come back for you.”

Rey gasped softly, her eyes beginning to sting with unshed tears. “Alie...” she said softly before cupping Aliana’s face and lunging into another passionate kiss. Aliana returned the kiss with

enthusiasm, taking Rey's hand in her own and squeezing it. She wished she could just stay like this forever, with no war to bother them.

"Well, good to see you up and about, Amorosa," Leia said, stepping onto the flightdeck.

Rey responded with a startled jolt before turning her gaze to the General, her face flushed. "Please tell me you weren't just watching us all that time," she said with a frown.

"I'm not a voyeur, Rey," Leia tsked before placing two mugs of caff on the table before them. "Just thought you two might like something to drink."

"Oh yes!" Aliana smiled as she picked up the mug and sipped it. "I haven't eaten real food in... I guess two months." It was then her eyes widened as she reached down and prodded her own ribs, wincing. "Yup. Feeding tube for two months. No doubt I look practically skeletal by now."

"Well, you still got some recovery time ahead of you. I'm sure you'll put it back on," Leia said before giving Rey a small smile. "I'm sure you could help with that, Rey. You praise Aliana's cooking so much, you must have picked up a thing or two."

"Oh! Um... of course!" Rey said, bemused at how suddenly on the spot she felt. She turned back to Aliana to give her a reassuring smile. "Don't worry, Alie. I'll be able to handle the cooking while you recover."

"I can still cook," Aliana laughed. "I need to be on my feet anyway or I'll just keep withering. 2V's already planning my physical therapy the freaking hen."

"Are you sure?" Rey asked, concern plain on her face. "I don't want you accidentally hurting yourself."

"Speaking of hens," Leia said, hiding a smirk behind her own mug as she took a sip.

"Hey!" Rey exclaimed.

"Don't call her a hen, I'm supposed to do that!" Aliana scoffed.

"Well, pardon me for overstepping," Leia said with a self satisfied smirk. "By all means, go ahead. Enlighten Rey about how unnecessarily worrisome she's being."

"I'm not *unnecessarily* worrisome!" Rey protested, sliding a hand around Aliana's shoulder. "I am exactly the right amount of worrisome for a woman whose girlfriend just came out of a coma."

"Actually Miss Rey, Miss Alie is in no immediate danger, as we are out of Republic space and headed for what has long been a safe haven for the Beniko family for generations," 2V chimed in.

"You heard the droid," Aliana smirked.

Rey looked at Aliana incredulously before pouting. "...I'm still gonna be worried," she said stubbornly. "You're sore, aching and practically emaciated. There's plenty for me to worry about."

"But I'll recover," Aliana smiled, laying a hand on Rey's cheek. "It's only another few months of exercise and check-ups. What's the worst that could happen? It's not like I had major surgery or anything."

“Major su-” Rey blinked before whirling her head to look at 2V. “You didn’t tell her yet?” she asked in disbelief.

“Miss Alie didn’t inquire about the details of her operation,” 2V explained with a shrug.

“What do you mean? What happened?” Aliana said, looking at Rey with confusion. “It’s just a stomach wound. Some bacta, some regenerative therapy and I’d be fine.”

“Actually, Miss Alie,” 2V began to correct, “the damage to your spine was quite severe. It warranted a full extraction followed by a cybernetic replacement. Your spinal cord, much like your left leg, is mechanical.”

Aliana’s pupils shrunk as she reached back and felt along her spine. She shuddered as she felt the surface column of a cybernetic spine on her back, no doubt running from the base of her pelvis to her neck. “Oh that’s... that’s creepy. I don’t even want to think about it. What else happened?”

“Well the operation also required the removal of a select few non vital organs,” 2V continued. “Their absence shall cause no damage to your current physicality.”

“Which ones?” Aliana asked. As if waiting for the question, 2V handed her a datapad and she started looking through it, “...Okay well those were vestigial anyway... wow I didn’t know that organ existed... oh, I’m gay so I had no use for that one...”

“So we shouldn’t expect any Amorosa juniors in the future?” Leia said with a wry grin.

“There’s always adoption,” Aliana shrugged as she continued looking over the file.

“What about your bloodline?” Leia asked.

“My what?” Aliana looked up with a confused expression on her face. “Bloodline? What about it?”

“You come from a long line of Sith,” Leia clarified. “The Force being strong in your family must have been the reason they continued to have children rather than taking an apprentice.”

“...No? They had children because they wanted children,” Aliana raised an eyebrow. “Bloodlines don’t mean anything. People strong in the Force are born every day. Rey’s stronger in the Force than I am and she has no bloodline.”

“Yeah, hell the Skywalkers only have... three generations of Force sensitivity to their name,” Rey continued. “I can’t exactly call it a bloodline.”

“Leia, where did you get the idea that the Force runs strong through blood?” Aliana asked.

“It was something that Luke believed,” Leia said with a slight shrug. “It made sense to me. Vader was strong in the Force. Luke and I inherited that strength and so did my son. It was simple genealogy.”

“There’s just one problem,” Aliana said with a slight chuckle. “You and Luke are considerably less strong in the Force than Ren is.”

Leia frowned. “Well that’s rude,” Leia said before sipping her caff.

“It’s true,” Rey smirked. “Besides, if Ren is anything to go by, strength in the Force will only get you so far.”

“Yeah, Force Sensitivity wavers between individuals. A Force prodigy’s children aren’t necessarily going to be as strong as their parent,” Aliana shrugged. “I mean, we can measure this with a blood test if you want.”

“That’s alright,” Leia said, waving her hand as if tossing the notion aside. “I’m not invested in the theory enough to offer you a chance to be smug about something.”

“Now, who’s being rude?” Rey asked, pursing her lips. “I’m actually curious. Can we do that?”

“Yeah,” Aliana said, waving to 2V, “2V! Take a blood sample from me and Rey. We’re going to do a midi-chlorian count.”

“Certainly Miss Alie. Shall I get the other samples?” 2V asked.

“Other samples?” Aliana asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Mr Finn’s blood was on Miss Rey’s robes when she returned from Ilum, and I believe the Dark Jedi’s blood was on yours when you returned from the Supremacy. I put them in biohazard containers when I was doing laundry.” 2V explained.

“Weird, but sure,” Aliana shrugged.

After a few minutes, 2V took samples from Rey and Aliana as well as collecting the other two from the cargo hold. As he started to analyze them, Rey looked on curiously.

“Midi-Chlorian count?” she asked.

“Force Sensitive bacteria found in the blood. It acts as a vector to use the Force. The higher your midi-chlorian count, the clearer you can feel the Force as it has more points of communication,” Aliana explained. “They were discovered by Darth Imperius several thousand years ago, and it was a breakthrough for identifying Force-Sensitives.”

“Interesting,” Rey said. “So how high does the count need to be for Force sensitivity to occur?”

“Twenty-five hundred is often accepted as the bare minimum in Humans,” 2V said as he continued to analyze the data. “Force sensitives in the galaxy tend to average around four thousand.”

“Four thousand in terms of what?” Rey asked.

“Specimens per cell, Miss Rey,” 2V explained.

“What are some examples?” Rey asked. “For comparison?”

“I believe Master Kenobi had a count of seventy-three hundred per cell,” 2V explained. “Master Yoda had a count of twelve-thousand per cell, and Anakin Skywalker had a count of twenty-three thousand per cell.”

“That was a jump!” Rey exclaimed.

“The Jedi thought he was some prophecized chosen one because of that,” Aliana laughed.

“Oh, yikes,” Rey said with a wince. “I suppose the lesson in that story is to not put your hopes in fate. The Force can be very cruel when you do that.”

“Yup,” Aliana nodded.

“The data is ready, Miss Alie,” 2V said as he ejected the blood samples.

“Well don’t keep us in suspense,” Aliana smiled.

“Very well. Mr Finn has a count of seven thousand per cell,” 2V explained, “Kylo Ren has a count of thirty-six thousand per cell, and you yourself have a count of fifty five hundred per cell.”

“Ha!” Aliana barked with a grin. “Thirty one thousand less than him and I still kick his ass!” She lifted an open hand to Rey who gleefully accepted with a high five.

“But wait,” Rey said, turning back to 2V. “You didn’t say what mine was yet.”

“I had to double check to ensure my results were not faulty,” 2V explained. “But it seems they were not. You have a midi-chlorian count of seventy-seven thousand per cell, Miss Rey.”

Rey's eyes widened, her gaze turning to her hand. "...Wow," she said softly. "...that's a lot of bacteria."

“I told you, you’re extremely strong in the Force,” Aliana smiled, leaning in and kissing her cheek. “And now with proper training, you’re deadly. I saw the holorecordings from Crait. I’m so proud of you, sweetie.”

Rey's cheeks turned a bold pink as a bashful smile graced her lips. "Heh... thanks, love. I just wish I had the sense to kill the bastard when I had the chance."

"A fault the both of you share, to be completely honest." Leia chimed. She placed her mug down and fixed both Rey and Aliana with a serious look. "Ever since the two of you met him you seemed more interested in making him suffer than ending his threat. I still care for Ben, but I've made my peace with what he's done and know he must face justice. But that won't happen if you two keep letting him go. If either of you are going to face him again, I need to know that you won't repeat these mistakes and will finish him before he can cause any more damage."

“Don’t worry, Leia. The next time I have the opportunity, I’m taking his head,” Aliana scowled. “It’s not like I *wanted* to get eviscerated the last time. And besides, most of the time he gets away by circumstance, not our own doing.”

Rey grimaced. "Yeah. The first time I saw Ren get away, he hurled me at that wall over there." She pointed down the corridor to the engine room, recalling the blunt force trauma she endured. "Little bastard."

“The first time he got away from me, I told him to stay away from me or die,” Aliana explained. “A reasonable ultimatum to offer. The second was that. The third was when Starkiller Base was about to fire.”

“There were three?” Leia asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Yeah. When I told you Kylo Ren couldn’t be redeemed, I was speaking from experience,” Aliana explained. “He had multiple chances to save his own skin and refused to.”

"And yet he's still alive and now leading the First Order," Leia added sullenly. "Just please make sure he doesn't escape a tenth time or however many he's on by now."

"We won't, Leia," Aliana scowled. "It's not like we're trying to let him escape. He'll die like the coward he is." At that assertion, Aliana's hands sparked dangerously.

"Never thought I would need such assurance," Leia mused, shaking her head. "I need more caff." Lifting herself from her seat and the mug from the table, she made her across the flight deck to Aliana's makeshift kitchen

"Easy for her to be judgy, she's not the one who has to fight the most brutal battles in this war," Aliana glared as Leia retreated. "Can't wait until she's off my ship."

"Won't be too much longer until we reach Odessen," Rey said rubbing Aliana's shoulders comfortingly. "Then we'll have the ship all to ourselves again."

"Thank the Force for that," Aliana cooed as she laid back against her Jedi. "I love you, Rey."

"I love you too."

"Supreme Leader?" an officer on the Supremacy said nervously. "There's a holocall for you from a hyperspace tunnel."

Kylo Ren's brow knitted behind his helmet as he turned to look at the officer. "...Put it through."

The holoterminal lit up with the menacing figure of Darth Amorosa, who grinned evilly toward Kylo Ren as she put up two middle fingers.

"I lived, schutta!"

Petty Disobedience and Romantic Pick-Up Lines

Rey's eyes fluttered open only slightly as her arms tightened around Aliana. Just yesterday she would have given anything to be able to hold her Sith as she slept, and now that it was finally a reality she could hardly believe it was true. She felt as if she might wake up and realize it was all a dream if she moved too quickly. For her part, Aliana was undisturbed as she nestled into Rey's shoulder and mumbled something incoherent in her sleep.

Rey had seen Aliana sleep these past two months. One would think she would tire of the sight. Yet in that moment, Rey couldn't have been happier. Even as she slept, Aliana appeared more alive than she had in weeks. It was truly enthralling for the Jedi to see. Even if she couldn't wait to see those gorgeous crimson eyes flutter open and look at her again, Rey also felt content laying there and holding Aliana for all eternity. For the first time in months, they had a truly perfect moment.

Aliana did eventually stir in Rey's arms, squirming as she tried to cuddle even closer to her. Her eyes opened and her head lazily rested on Rey's shoulder as she smiled up at her. "Good morning, sweetheart," she mumbled. "How'd you sleep?"

Rey felt like she might cry at how utterly breathtaking Aliana was in that moment. "Wonderfully," Rey said, tilting her head to plant a soft kiss on Aliana's forehead. "It feels so good to wake up with you in my arms again." She slowly lifted up an arm to brush a wild lock of curly hair away from Aliana's face, taking a moment to marvel at her perfection.

"You couldn't cuddle me when I was out?" Aliana asked as she kissed Rey's neck.

Rey shrugged. "It didn't feel right," she explained. "Plus if I did that, I don't think I would have been able to let go until you finally woke up."

"Fair," Aliana giggled as she pulled herself up to kiss Rey's cheek, "I'd feel the same way if I were in your position."

"I know you would," Rey smiled, brushing the bridge of her nose gently against Aliana's. "...I'm so happy you're finally awake. I didn't know how much longer I could go without having you like this."

Aliana's smile fell slightly, "Was it really that bad?" she asked, her fingers clutching at the front of Rey's undershirt.

"It wasn't pleasant, that's for sure," Rey answered, an arm curling around the small of Aliana's back to pull her closer. "There was just so much stress and irritating nonsense the past few weeks. Ordinarily when things ever got that bad, I would just come find you and feel all my troubles melt away. I could have a moment of unbridled happiness with you. I couldn't do that these past two months. It was... intense, to say the least."

Aliana was quiet as she nestled her head under Rey's chin. "I'm sorry, Rey..."

"You don't need to apologize," Rey whispered softly, tenderly stroking the unruly curls of the Sith's hair. "It wasn't your fault this happened. It was that wretched Jedi who did this to you. Don't think for a second that you have anything to be sorry for. Don't humor the thought."

“But Rey, I-”

“Aliana, this isn’t your fault!” Rey said more firmly as she clutched Aliana tighter to her.

Aliana looked up at Rey in surprise. She’d half-expected Rey to let her continue apologizing as she usually did, but it seemed that Rey’s promise the day before had been genuine. “I... okay,” she whispered, kissing Rey’s cheek again and squeezing her tightly.

Rey exhaled slowly as a warm smile curled on her lips as she resumed resting her chin against Aliana’s head. “...I hate that I had to go so long without you, but I’m happy to have you here now,” she said softly. Her legs shifted as she intertwined them with Aliana’s. Or rather, one of them. Apparently the cold metal of Aliana’s prosthetic wasn’t especially pleasant against bare skin, so they detached it before settling into bed last night. “...Make sure you put your leg back on when we get up,” she said, a playful smirk teasing the end of her mouth. “Otherwise I’ll have to carry you all over the ship.”

“Yeah, I keep forgetting about that,” Aliana winced. “It’s horrible. I keep snagging it on everything.”

Rey wanted to reassure Aliana that it wouldn’t be like this forever and that she was working on a special new, better cybernetic leg for her. Still, she wanted to keep it a surprise, like Aliana did when she made her a lightsaber. It only felt appropriate. “We’ll figure something out,” she said simply, kissing the top of Aliana’s head.

“Well the sooner the better,” Aliana winced. “2V could have at least enclosed the damn thing so I’m not ripping wires out. And maybe not made it look so skeletal. I look like I had my foot dipped in acid.”

“I’ll be sure to have a word with him about that, if you choose to lose more limbs in the future,” Rey teased, a hand reaching up to gently scratched at Aliana’s scalp. “Though I would like it if you chose not to. I like your limbs.”

“I like them too,” Aliana giggled, pulling her head away from Rey’s hand, “And don’t scratch my scalp, I’m not an akk dog.”

“Pardon me,” Rey said softly, a hint of a teasing tone in her voice. She leaned back slightly to look at Aliana, her hand gently grasping at the Sith’s chin and tilting her head upward. “...By the stars, you’re beautiful,” she marveled. “How is it possible for all the beauty in the galaxy to be in a single woman?”

“Guess I just never met the right girl until now,” Aliana snickered.

Rey was momentarily silenced, hoping the red lighting of the room concealed her blush. “I-I’m serious!” she huffed slightly. “You are the most gorgeous woman I’ve ever seen. You’re even prettier than Amilyn!”

Aliana raised an eyebrow, “Is Amilyn supposed to be some kind of benchmark I wasn’t told about?”

“I mean, you have looked at Amilyn right? That woman is very attractive at her age,” Rey mused. “...Come to think of it, Rose is pretty cute too. So is her sister. Oh! I don’t know if you remember Talon, but we met her while you were out and she is very pretty too. She has this-” Rey trailed off

as her eyes widened a fraction. As her train of thought continued, it was as if some single piece of information in her mind suddenly clicked into place as an epiphany. "...Oh."

"What is it, sweetie?" Aliana asked with a soft giggle. "What does she have?"

Rey's attention drifted as she started dwelling on what she'd just realized. She'd been staring at all of those women whenever they were around. She'd been staring at *a lot* of women since she left Jakku. It was often what distracted her the most. She'd been checking out Paige when they met, and Rose when they were working on the Falcon. She couldn't *stop* staring at Amilyn and with Talon it was even worse. Half of them were her friends and yet she was gawking at them like they were holos in the back of the cargo hold. But now that she was thinking about it, she'd never so much as cast a similar glance at Finn or Poe. And then it fell into place.

"Alie..." she began. "...I'm gay."

The room was silent for a beat before Aliana started giggling wildly.

"Well I sure hope you are," Aliana laughed. "We've been dating for seven months, you silly goober."

"Don't be mean!" Rey pouted. "This is a major revelation for me!" Despite her indignance, she pulled Aliana back into their embrace, their bodies fitting perfectly together like two components. "Besides, even if I didn't know I liked other women, I knew I liked you."

"Awww, I feel so hypothetically special," Aliana snickered as she kissed along Rey's neck. "Okay really, I'm proud of you. That's a big step to take, Kitten."

Rey blinked, a flush of red returning to her cheeks. "Kitten?"

Aliana smiled and kissed Rey's cheek, "I guess so. Is that a problem, Kitten?"

"...No, I don't think so," Rey said, a flustered smile spreading across her lips. "Kitten. I like it. You should call me that around Leia. It'll drive her up the wall."

"Why's that?" Aliana raised an eyebrow.

"It gives off the idea that you've enthralled me," Rey explained, wiggling her fingers as a near sinister smile spread wider across her face. "That I've fully succumbed to your Sithly wiles."

"She's still on that?" Aliana raised an eyebrow. "I thought she got over herself or something?"

"She's accepted that you're not the next Sidious and that you do genuinely care about me," Rey clarified. "It's just that our mutual reliance on the dark side still makes her uncomfortable." Rey tilted her head to the side, a thought crossing her mind. "I think that's the reason she's grown so fond of Finn lately."

"She'll just latch onto any Force Sensitive that hasn't touched the Dark Side, will she?" Aliana rolled her eyes. "Alright, let's give her hell. Been a while since I did something like this."

"Sounds like a plan," Rey said mischievously before pressing her lips softly to Aliana's. "I don't mind flaunting our relationship a little now that you're back."

“Good, then you won’t mind if I do this,” Aliana smirked as she grabbed Rey by the neck and pulled her into a passionate kiss. She pulled Rey along with her as she fell to her back on the bed, kissing the Jedi hungrily and tangling her fingers in her loose, flowing hair.

Rey's eyes widened before fluttering closed. She melted into the fiery kiss. Her arms wrapped tightly around Sith's waist as she tilted her head slightly, deepening the kiss. She moaned into the other woman's mouth as their tongues swiped and swirled around each other. Rey felt heat flare up in her cheeks as well as her belly. Aliana's kisses were, indeed, enthralling. She giggled as Aliana's nails dug into the back of her neck, the little moans and squeaks she made sending shivers down Rey's spine.

“You’re... unbelievable... sometimes,” Rey said in what few moments she had to take a breath.

“I... know...” Aliana whispered, gently biting Rey's bottom lip.

Their moment of soft lips and hot breaths was halted when they heard the sound of soft chirping and the pitter patter of webbed feet against the metal floor. Then the sound of ruffled fabric as something struggled in vain to climb into the bed.

"Looks like someone wants to see you," Rey said with a smile. Without even lifting a hand, she reached out with the force, closing a gentle grip around the source of the noises and pulling it up into the bed. The porg thudded softly on the comforters before waddling up to Aliana, its head all but crashing into the Sith's shoulder in an attempt to nuzzle her.

“Well hey there,” Aliana giggled as she scooped the Porg into her hand. “Did you miss me? Did 2V take good care of you while I was gone?” She tickled the Porg's underbelly with her finger. “Oh, I think I found a name for him, by the way.”

“Oh? What's that?”

“I’m gonna call him Porgracing,” Aliana said with a goofy grin on her face.

Rey's brow furrowed in confusion. "...mhm, I see... why's that, exactly?"

“It's cute. It catches people off guard,” Aliana smiled.

Rey couldn't help but smile, shaking her head slightly. "Fair enough," she said before leaning in to give one kiss to Aliana and another atop the porgs head. "You like that name, Porgracing?"

Porgracing chirped in affirmation as he tried to bite Aliana's finger.

“I guess I should feed him,” Aliana sighed as she sat up in bed, stretching. “Little bird interrupted my makeout with my favorite Jedi,” she said playfully.

"Don't worry. You have the rest of our lives to make out with me," Rey assured her. She draped her arms over her shoulders and kissed her cheek tenderly.

“The rest of our lives? That sounds like a proposal,” Aliana giggled, playfully elbowing Rey in the side.

Rey's eyes widened again. "Oh! Um... I mean I didn't exactly intend it that way. N-Not that I'm saying I never really thought about it. I mean I certainly don't hate the idea. Far from it. I would love to- oh, is that too forward?" Rey's words became increasingly more frantic and rushed as she

continued. "I... what I mean is I certainly would enjoy the chance to propose, i-if it was something you also wanted. I would just make sure it was more special and less casual. Does that make sense?"

Aliana's eyes were wide and she looked like a Ysalamir caught in floodlights. "Um... I was making a joke, Rey..."

Rey's eyes darted back and forth before she mustered the courage to look back at Aliana. "...I knew that."

"Then what was with the babbling?" Aliana asked, a nervous laugh escaping her.

Rey sat there in silence, her eyes returning to look to and fro rather than at Aliana. "...Also a joke?" Rey said with a slight shrug.

"C'mon Rey, tell me what's up," Aliana smiled as she stretched. "I won't be mad."

Rey sighed, her shoulders slumping. "Ok... at the Senate hearing, Senator Marek was vouching for us, but when I told him that I didn't have a last name, he decided to address me as Rey Beniko." She felt a warm fluttering in her chest as the name left her lips. "I've been thinking about that ever since. How... how I would actually like the idea of being Mrs. Beniko. I can't get the idea out of my head."

Aliana's smile softened and she looked at Rey with appreciation, "Rey, that's... that's really sweet. But not yet. It's too soon, and we aired out a lot of things yesterday. Things need to be better before we consider that."

"I know," Rey nodded, managing to meet Aliana's gaze. "Thanks for hearing me out, though. I was worried that what I said would scare you."

"You couldn't scare me," Aliana smiled, laying a hand on Rey's cheek and staring into her gorgeous brown eyes, "I love you way too much for that. And it's not like I haven't thought about it either."

The flush returned to Rey's cheeks. "...oh. Well that's good. I... I hope it's something we both can think about... later. When the time is right." Despite her bout of awkwardness, she managed a genuine smile.

Aliana returned the smile and slid closer to her, laying both hands on her shoulders as her fingers rubbed the fabric of her new robes. "Your new look is pretty hot," she giggled.

Rey giggled and looked down in herself. "Thanks. I was hoping you'd like it," she said, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear.

"I love it," Aliana grinned. "You look good with your hair down. You look more relaxed, more sure of yourself. And the color goes so well with your eyes."

"You think so?" Rey smiled and threaded her fingers through her hair as the other hand straightened out her tunic. "I guess I am more relaxed without my hair being so uncomfortably pulled back all the time."

"Yeah, why did you wear it like that anyway?" Aliana asked, raising an eyebrow. "Couldn't have been comfortable."

"I used to be a scavenger," Rey answered. "It was difficult and unpleasant to work on machines with hair over your face. Got grease in it more than once." She shuddered slightly at the memory.

"I figured. But why keep tying it back after you left?" Aliana asked curiously.

"I was just used to it, I guess," Rey said with a shrug. "It also didn't make sense to fight or train with loose flowing hair... but learning not to rely solely on my eyes solved that problem, I suppose."

"Yeah, hair stops being a problem when you use the Force to compensate," Aliana said as she ran her fingers through her own hair. "Was never one for tying my hair back at all, to be honest."

"And why would you be?" Rey asked, stepping closer to Aliana with a fond smile. "Your hair is literally perfect."

"Perfect? Oh I don't know about that," Aliana blushed, self-consciously running her fingers down the back. "I barely even comb it anymore."

"Because it's already flawless," Rey cooed, pulling Aliana into her arms. "Your hair, your freckles, your eyes, your smile. Everything about you is perfect."

Aliana was quiet, a hand on her chest as she stared at Rey in disbelief. "Really? ...Everything? Even..." she unconsciously ran her fingers under her eyes.

"Of course your eyes," Rey repeated with a smile. "They're so warm and comforting."

"Usually they frighten people," Aliana explained as she kissed Rey's cheek. "My mother used to try to convince me not to channel the Dark Side as much as I do because my eyes were turning into a walking signal beacon."

"Well they certainly never frightened me," Rey said reassuringly. "And you certainly don't have to worry about drawing attention to yourself now. Anyone who tries to touch you will have to go through me."

"Well I guess that means I'll have to win a lightsaber duel every time I touch myself," Aliana laughed as she kissed Rey's neck.

Rey's breath hitched in her throat at Aliana's words and lips. "...you enjoy flustering me, don't you?" She asked, an indignant pout on her face.

"Is it working?" Aliana purred as she circled her finger around Rey's collarbone.

Rey bit her lips before managing a scoff and giving Aliana's shoulder a playful push. "Go put your leg on, you dork." Her words were not as firm as she might have liked thanks to the redness in her cheeks.

Aliana pulled Rey in and kissed her fiercely before just as quickly backing away. "Really though, thanks. I like my eyes like this, and it's nice to hear that someone else does too."

Rey found herself breathless for a moment before dumbly nodding. "Of course," she managed to say. "I love everything about you."

Aliana finally pulled away and went about fastening her leg to it's plate below her knee, I wish this thing could be comfortable enough to keep on."

"I'm sure something can be done about it," Rey said, still not wanting to give away the surprise. "I might look at it later tonight and see what I can do." She kneeled over to pick Porggracing up, giving the bird a fond smile. "You hungry, little one?"

Porggracing chirped happily, nuzzling into Rey's arm. Aliana finished fastening her leg into place and shuddered as it finally engaged. "Ugh! I hate this thing already. It feels so weird when it's booting up. Can't I just float around with the Force or something?"

"It's a bad idea to rely on the Force too much, Alie," Rey cautioned. "Especially when it's been so cruel to the both of us. The more we rely on it, the more cruel we allow it to be."

Aliana frowned, "You found Traya's holocron, didn't you?"

"Her philosophy is very fascinating," Rey said with a smile. "Which reminds me, at some point I want to continue teaching you more about ship maintenance."

"You sure about that? Because the last time I got my hand caught in the Hyperdrive generator," Aliana winced as she remembered. "I seriously thought I was going to have to pull a Vader to get out of that one."

"All the more reason to teach you," Rey insisted as she gently rocked Porggracing back and forth in her arms. "Tech illiteracy can be mended. Knowledge is power."

"...You just had to pull the 'knowledge is power' line," Aliana scoffed. "You know a Sith can't resist power! That's not fair!"

"And who taught me not to play fair?" Rey asked playfully before leaning to kiss Aliana on the cheek.

"The apprentice has learned too well," Aliana sighed, nuzzling into Rey's cheek with a smile. "A powerful Sith you will become."

"Perhaps someday," Rey said. "When the Republic isn't so insistent of the return of Jedi in the galaxy."

"I'll hold you to it," Aliana purred as she stood up. "I'm just going to get a shower and then I'll- HEY!" she jumped as she felt Rey pinch her rear.

"Sorry, not sorry," Rey grinned.

"Nice for the two of you to finally join us," Leia said disapprovingly as Rey and Aliana finally came out of the Fury and into the command center. Rey's new look had attracted the surprised glances of their friends, while Aliana had elicited gasps that she was up and moving without any fanfare whatsoever.

"When did she wake up?" Poe asked.

“Probably around the same time Rey put on the Sith getup,” Finn whispered back.

“No, she probably took it off when Alie woke up,” Poe snickered, earning himself a fist to the ribs from Rose.

“Sorry, we had a bit of a slow start,” Aliana said, tapping the side of her mechanical leg with her other foot. It was a lie of course, but she felt if she told them the truth, Leia would just delay the meeting to grumble and groan about her some more.

“Are you at least ready?” Leia asked, raising an eyebrow.

“I am, what about you Kitten?” Aliana asked, glancing at Rey with a smirk.

The eyes of everyone present widened a fraction save Rey who simply smirked back at her. “With you by my side, I’m ready for anything,” she replied.

“They wasted no time getting right back into it,” Poe scoffed.

“Just because you have nobody in your life doesn’t mean everyone else is as miserable as you,” Rose snickered.

Poe turned to Finn, “Are you miserable, Nobody?”

Finn shrugged with an easy smile. “I can’t complain, handsome.”

“Oh! Called it!” Aliana grinned pointing at Finn and Poe.

“Can we focus?” Leia asked, resisting the urge to roll her eyes.

“You have a bunch of early twenty-somethings in here, of course we can’t,” Aliana snickered.

“Well, in light of all the good news being passed around, congratulations, you two,” Amilyn said, smiling at Finn and Poe, “-allow me to add to it. After our relatively successful audience with the Senate, the Resistance can expect a supply drop from the Republic within the week.”

There was an air of surprise around the Resistance. Men and women looking around confused, as if they’d expected to be left hanging out to dry by the Republic. Even Aliana was confused, as Rey had taken her ship to go to Coruscant, and from what she’d heard it hadn’t gone well the moment they landed.

“How?” Aliana asked.

“Yeah, we all pretty much thought we were just gonna be left here to rot,” Rose admitted.

“Well, as it turns out, Rey is very good at pressing politicians into line,” Amilyn replied, offering the Jedi a soft smile. “With her unique tactics of negotiation, and the reality of the First Order’s threat, the Republic realized that it would be best for us to work together.”

The confused murmur around the base slowly turned more cheerful as Leia and Amilyn laid out the plans for the base long-term. Supplies would take a while to arrive, and so the work for the next few weeks would be mostly digging into the canyon and infrastructure. Aliana was already dreading the sheer amount of Force-lifting she would have to do, especially as the digging started.

“There’s also the matter of leadership,” Leia explained. “We lost most of our officers in the battle of Crait and the chase beforehand. The majority of the Admiralty and High Command is dead. As such, we either need people to step up to lead, or nominate others.”

"Well I, for one, nominate Aliana and Rey," Finn said gesturing to the two.

Rey and Aliana shared a look of surprise, whilst Poe appeared almost hurt.

"They're our best fighters, they're good with people and they get us the best results. If anyone here deserves to be a leader, it's them."

"Finn, you can't just nominate your friends," Leia sighed, rubbing her eyes. "I swear to the Force..."

"I just explained why they should be leaders!" Finn said. "I didn't nominate them just because!"

“It’s not just fighting and delegating, Finn. I’m talking about putting people in charge of entire specialized operations,” Leia explained. “Powerful as they are, Rey can’t keep her temper in check and Aliana is already on a tentative pardon with the Republic.”

“A pardon for what? What did I do?” Aliana looked bewildered.

"...Being a Sith apparently," Rey explained. "Apparently that's a Republic crime. Kinda wish someone told me that sooner." She turned to narrow her eyes at Leia and Amilyn.

"We assumed you already knew," Amilyn said with a frown.

“I didn’t even grow up in the Republic!” Rey scoffed.

“The point is, neither of you are cut out for leadership,” Leia explained.

“You only disqualified Alie on a techni-” Rose started before Aliana cut her off.

“I nominate Rose Tico,” she said.

"What!?" Rose asked incredulously.

"She's smart, level headed, knows our operations inside and out, has proven herself as a tactician and as a field agent on board the supremacy and her organization skills have been helping things run as smoothly as possible in the turbulent circumstances we find ourselves in." Aliana turned to give Rose a confident smile. "She would make a fine leader."

Rose’s mouth was hanging open as she stared at Aliana.

“The Fury’s records show that she retrofitted speeders to serve as air support in the Battle of Crait on an extremely short deadline,” Aliana continued. “She saved half the Resistance with her quick thinking and resourcefulness. I firmly believe that if she’d had the authority, we would still have a fleet. General, it would be a mistake not to make her an Admiral.”

"I..." Rose felt at a loss for words.

"...Well, I'm not hearing anyone oppose the notion," Leia said before turning to Rose. "Miss Tico, do you object to this nomination?"

"Uh-No! No, of course not!" Rose replied, going from speechless to giddy. "I would be honored to take such a position."

"Then I welcome you to High Command, Admiral Tico," Leia smiled. "I'm going to put you in command of getting the ships we salvaged from the Alliance base functioning and ready to fly."

"T-Thank you, General!" Rose said, nearly being reduced to tears. "I promise I won't let you down!"

A small round of applause was heard throughout the war room. Rose clapped her hand over her mouth and her legs nearly gave out. She was completely overwhelmed. Just a few months ago she was doing maintenance as usual. Never would she have imagined being made Admiral. And all it took was one vote of confidence. She practically sprinted across the room and ran full-tilt into Aliana, throwing her arms around the Sith and hugging her tightly as she cried into her shoulder.

"Oof!" Aliana grunted, Rose having slammed right into her injured midsection. Nevertheless, she returned the hug and held the shorter woman steady. "Hey, it's alright. You deserve this."

"You're the best!" Rose said, giving Aliana a final tight squeeze before pulling away to reveal her smile only got wider. "I can see why Rey fell in love with you."

Aliana blushed and looked away, "Is every woman in the Resistance this gay?" she muttered.

"Perhaps," Holdo said with a playful wink.

"Congratulations Rose," Rey said, pulling the smaller woman into a one armed hug. "You deserve this more than anyone."

"Thanks Rey," Rose smiled, hugging her as well. "I can't believe it. This is going to be great! I'm going to have a whole fleet of corvettes ready to go by the end of the month!"

"Speaking of, how badly did you guys ransack my home?" Aliana asked, glancing at Leia and Amilyn.

"We didn't completely dismantle it," Leia said with a wave of her hand. "Whatever didn't serve an immediate purpose we left alone. We mostly took ship pieces and old weapons, but Rey did see to it that the holocrons were recovered."

"As long as the systems are still running, then I have no complaints," Aliana shrugged.

Rey turned to Aliana. "Did you want to go take a look? I know it must have been a while since you've been there."

Aliana shook her head, "I haven't been there since right after Mom died. And I don't think I'm ready to deal with going back yet."

"Okay," Rey said, her tone sympathetic as she placed her hands on Aliana's shoulders. She rested her head against the Sith's, leaning against her only slightly so as to not risk toppling her over.

"Thanks, Kitten," Aliana cooed, stroking Rey's cheek and smiling.

"Oh for Force sake," Leia groaned, resting her head against an open palm.

"Something the matter General?" Rey asked, her innocent timbre betrayed by the mischievous grin on her face.

"A little professionalism would be nice," Leia replied, clearly exasperated.

"Rey calls me Alie all the time," Aliana said with a subtle smirk. "What's the difference?"

"That's an abbreviation of your actual name. Not some overly saccharine pet name," Leia explained, her brow furrowed in unamusement.

"Yeah, but it's cute," Aliana giggled, stroking Rey's hair. "And that makes it perfect for my Jedi."

" *Your* Jedi-? Oh, Force, give me strength," Leia sighed, rubbing her temples.

"Is the General jealous?" Rey teased.

"I mean, I did train her a lot more than Luke did," Aliana said, holding Rey by the waist and kissing her hair. "And she's so powerful thanks to me." She grinned at Leia in an almost taunting way.

"Which is a point of contention in and of itself," Leia said with a frown. "The Senate is already wary of you two."

"Let them be wary," Rey said, not taking her eyes off of Aliana. "They don't have to like our methods, just accept our results "

"That's a wonderful attitude, Kitten," Aliana purred, stroking Rey's cheek.

"Why thank you, my beautiful Sith," Rey cooed, leaning forward to capture Aliana's lips in a quick but intimate kiss.

"If the two of you are done," Leia sighed, "There's still plenty of work to do."

Rey and Aliana hadn't quit trying to get under Leia's skin. It was far too easy and it was a petty way to push back against Leia's placating attitude toward the Senate. For the rest of the week the two had been more affectionate in public than ever, and Rey had put on an act of being under some kind of spell.

Finn and Poe found it hilarious, especially the way the General reacted. They had tried to encourage Alie to start referring to Rey as her apprentice, but they'd been hesitant to provoke the General that much. The fact that Rey still called herself a Jedi was probably the only thing keeping Leia's blood pressure down.

Of course that didn't stop Leia from cornering Aliana during one of the brief moments she wasn't glued to Rey's hip.

"Aliana, can I talk to you?" Leia asked.

Aliana put down the crates she'd been hauling with the Force and sat on one of them. "This about Rey again?"

"Yes," Leia nodded, opting to stand in front of Aliana rather than sit beside her. "I understand that you two are happy being together again, and I've accepted you as one of us, but I feel as though your encouragement of her worst habits is getting out of hand."

"What habits am I encouraging?" Aliana asked, raising an eyebrow. "Petty disobedience and Romantic pick up lines? Lightsaber training which is necessary?"

"Regarding you as her master," Leia began. "A horrible habit to have. Even if you both claim it's a joke, it's only so many times you can say it before it becomes unironic. There's also the matter of her trusting your judgement above everyone else's, perhaps even her own. It explains her swinging back and forth between ruthless and sadistic."

"Okay first of all, I AM the one who's training her. Technically speaking, that does make me her Master," Aliana explained. "As for my judgment, my judgment hasn't steered her wrong yet. Is it any surprise that she trusts my judgment when my judgment has caused her to flourish?"

"A Jedi trained by a Sith does not a good Jedi make," Leia countered. "At some point, people are going to see learning and practicing Sith teachings and recognize her title of Jedi as a lie. And with that dissonance comes the risk of the Republic turning their attention to the both of you once the First Order is dealt with. If you didn't so readily flaunt how wrapped around your finger Rey is, you wouldn't have this problem."

"Except it isn't MY problem," Aliana scoffed, hopping off the crate. "The Republic deciding to target me and Rey because I'm Sith and Rey might be doesn't say anything about either of us. It says that the Republic is a hive of paranoid idiots who would turn on their own allies out of baseless fear. If me and Rey haven't earned the Republic's respect by saving their lives, killing Snoke, and sowing fear and discord among the First Order, then the Republic's respect isn't worth the datapad it's written on."

"Except it's not their respect or lack thereof you need to worry about. It's the possibility that you will be labeled as enemies to the core worlds," Leia stressed. "Both you and Rey have the potential to do a lot of good for the galaxy even after the war, but you can't do that with another galactic power breathing down your neck. You'll be back to running and surviving only now you'll be dragging Rey along with you. You both could resort to doing shady jobs in the criminal underworld just to get by. She doesn't deserve that and neither should you. I know it's not fair, but if you two don't want to be on the run your entire lives, you have to know when enough is enough."

"Leia, what am I supposed to do? The Republic hates me because I'm Sith," Aliana explained. "How am I supposed to do anything about that? I AM Sith. I will always be Sith. If the Republic really is that paranoid, then both I and Rey are doomed to that kind of life no matter what I do. You're talking to the wrong person about this. What am I supposed to do about this? Tell me, Leia. How do I make the Republic not hate me anymore?"

"You can't," Leia said plainly. "That much is obvious. But it's not too late for Rey. If the Republic sees that you two are equals in balance, powerful light to contend powerful darkness, then they may very well leave you alone. And I'm talking to you because I know for a fact Rey wouldn't listen to me about this. But she'll listen to you. You don't even have to say 'Hey Rey. Practice the light side or else the Republic will kill us both.' Just nudge her in the right direction. Encourage her to read more Jedi holocrons. Practice reigning in her temper. That sort of thing. If the people see something other than a Sith and her apprentice, they're less likely to be afraid and do something stupid."

“Leia don’t you hear yourself? You’re still trying to appease the Republic and you’re acting as if fraternizing with a Sith isn’t already a capital crime. The only way I could ensure the Republic doesn’t turn on Rey is to break her heart and leave her forever,” Aliana glared down at the aging Jedi. She was so tired of having this conversation with Jedi.

Leia stopped a moment to center herself. She didn't want to risk getting angry with Aliana. She knew that wouldn't get anywhere. "I just want to make sure that sh- that you both will be okay after the war. Maybe the Republic will come to be less fearful of Sith, but that sort of thing takes time and I worry that's time neither of you will live to see."

“Giving the Republic time has only seen the women in my family be murdered,” Aliana said coldly. “Even the wise, non-violent Jedi Order saw fit to attack a mother and her daughter in cold blood. I’m done giving the Republic time. They’ve had enough time. I won’t start a war with the Republic. But if after the First Order is destroyed they see fit to come after me and Rey, I will bring the full wrath of the Sith Empire down onto their backs and turn their own fear and arrogance into a nightmare from which they will never wake!”

"What empire?" Leia asked, narrowing her gaze at Aliana. "You only have a ship and a Droid to your name, your connections with the criminal underworld are flimsy at best and, unlike the Sith of Darth Bane's order, you don't have the luxury of anonymity. You fight a war against the Republic, you'll lose. That grandiose ego is only going to get you and Rey killed."

Aliana looked at the older woman, and a sinister smirk slowly crawled across her face. She reached down for her comlink and hit a single button. “This is Amorosa. Bring your ships into orbit.”

She put her comlink back onto her belt. “Leia, I’ve spent the last ten years building confidence and loyalty across the Outer Rim. You assumed my contacts and goodwill were with people like Niima the Hutt and the rest of the gangsters. In reality my contact on Niima’s barge was the Sith Lord there. Talon. I took jobs for Niima, but I never did them well because I was always more concerned about the people stuck working for him. The people the Republic always forgot about. I did what the Jedi spent centuries refusing to do. I disrupted the Hutts. I defended the planets that the First Order threatened early in the war, I brought aid and relief to people who needed it. That builds loyalty. The reason Rey trusts my judgment so much is because I’ve earned her loyalty.”

To punctuate her words, a number of ships dropped out of Hyperspace in Odessen’s atmosphere. A dozen heavy cruisers and frigates, several dozen corvettes and support ships respectively, and what appeared to be a small armada of fighters, cargo ships and other freighters.

“And that loyalty makes allies,” Aliana said, gesturing to the armada in the sky. “This is the Sith fleet.”

Leia looked up at the mass of ships in the sky. Her eyes were wide with surprise and disbelief. After a beat longer of amazement, she tilted her gaze back down, giving Aliana an incredulous look. "Did you seriously have a fleet waiting in hyperspace for you to deploy just so you could win an argument?" she asked.

“They were already coming, I just had them slow down a bit,” Aliana smirked. “We need ships, the Republic wouldn’t provide, and so I did instead. A common theme so far these last few months.”

Aliana lifted her comlink and spoke into it, “Talon, bring the transports down to the surface with the cargo ships and help get this base constructed.”

“Yes, Master,” came Talon’s voice on the comlink.

Aliana took another glance at Leia. “I risked my life on the Supremacy to save the Resistance, and you threw it back in my face. You don’t deserve the aid I just brought you. But this isn’t about you, this is about crushing the First Order. I don’t need a fleet to handle you. So here’s how this is going to work. I’m going to train Rey as I see fit. If she chooses to become Sith, then she becomes Sith. I have no interest whatsoever in placating the Republic by molding Rey into something she’s not.”

As a transport roared overhead, a cloud of dust was kicked up and made both women shield their eyes. When it finally settled, Aliana set her glare on Leia again.

“Your relationship with the Republic is not my problem. The Republic’s view of me is not my problem. I have done nothing to them or you, and I do not deserve this continued suspicion. I thought that maybe you were coming around, but I guess I was wrong,” Aliana frowned, looking genuinely hurt. “One more problem with you, and I will send my fleet home, take Rey and leave.”

“...Fine,” Leia said. There was nothing else to say not after what Aliana had just done and said to her. No words of contest would help. As such, she turned and began to walk away, but stopped for a moment to turn back around. One final thought crossing her mind. “And... for what it's worth... I'm sorry.”

Aliana’s glare softened somewhat. “Thank you. But please... stop trying to drive a wedge between me and Rey.”

“A fair request,” Leia nodded before turning back to walk down the unfinished corridor.



“Basic structures are in place and construction is getting underway,” Talon explained as she, Aliana and Rey strolled down the canyon. “The total ship count is forty-eight large ships and several hundred fighters, but a lot of them lack the crew to function well.”

“It’s better than one corvette and a few X-Wings,” Aliana smiled.

"This is remarkable!" Rey beamed with joy. "Talon, you are incredible!"

"Amorosa was the one who brought all these people together," Talon said with a shrug. "I just keep them in line."

"Still, better work than with Niima I bet," Rey offered.

"Better work to be proud of," Talon nodded in agreement, "...though I am gonna miss that salary."

“We’ll rob a Hutt frigate and pilfer it for credits,” Aliana assured her, “But you’ll be well fed here, I promise.”

"I believe you, master," the Twi'lek said with a fond smile. "Rey told me that you're a hell of a cook."

“I’m a good cook for a drifter. Not gonna wow any Corellia socialites any time soon,” Aliana laughed. “Leia says my food is too spicy.”

"Of course she kriffing does," Talon said, rolling her eyes. "The pale humans never have any taste... present company excluded."

"Hey no worries," Rey smirked. "I first found the flavor in Alies cooking almost overwhelming... which made me love it more, honestly."

"Rey even says *I* taste good," Aliana snickered.

"Really?" Talon asked, smirking and bouncing her eyebrows.

"Not like that!" Aliana laughed. "Yet..."

"Wait, really?" Talon asked, her yellow eyes wide with surprise "How long have you two been together?"

"About 7 months?" Rey replied.

"And you still haven't slept with her!?" Talon asked Aliana incredulously.

"Yes, I know. It's very unlike me," Aliana said sarcastically. "But it's not like I can snap my fingers and make it happen. Rey isn't *you*."

"Hey don't act like you don't know what you're capable of," Talon remarked. "I'm pretty sure at least a handful of the people we brought are the hearts you've broken. That tongue of yours is very versatile it seems."

Rey looked at Aliana with a raised eyebrow, "You slept with Talon?"

"A couple of times," Aliana shrugged. "I think she was my first, actually."

"She was a natural," Talon said, her expression suddenly sinful. "A tough act to follow for anyone else."

Rey was quiet, but clung to Aliana's arm and held tightly as they continued walking. This strange shift in behavior didn't go unnoticed by Aliana or Talon.

"You're not jealous, are you Kitten?" Aliana asked, kissing her cheek.

"What? Oh of course not!" Rey said, pushing a smile back on her face. "Why would I be jealous?"

"Oh my god, you ARE!" Aliana grinned. "You're jealous!"

"I- oh shut up!" Rey huffed as she swatted Aliana's shoulder but still held onto her tightly. "You don't have to be smug about it."

Aliana glanced at Talon and smiled. "Do me a favor and go check the supply manifest."

"Got it," Talon nodded in understanding as she quickly left the two alone.

Once she was out of earshot, Aliana threw her arms around Rey's shoulders and pulled her down to kiss her passionately. Her fingers gently caressed the Jedi's cheek as she pushed her tongue into her mouth. Rey was taken aback by the sudden act but soon found her footing and returned the kiss

with equal fervor. Her arms wrapped around the Sith's slim waist as she moaned softly against the tongue exploring her mouth.

Aliana gently bit Rey's lip before pulling away. "I've slept with a lot of women in the last nine years, Rey. But I've never felt about anyone the way I feel about you. I hope being around old girlfriends won't make you think you aren't special to me."

"It won't," Rey sighed contentedly, holding Aliana close to her. "I just... I guess I'm still wondering what makes me so special. Someone that you don't mind... waiting for." She rested her forehead against Aliana's and frowned. "Does that sound bad? I don't doubt that you love me, I just wonder why sometimes."

"Well," Aliana said as she stroked Rey's hair, "For one, you're unbelievably loyal. I've never had to worry about being surrounded by the Republic because I always knew you had my back. You're really patient with me when I can't figure out my own ship. You have a laugh that's so pretty it gives me chills to listen to. Your accent is heaven on my ears. You always scrunch your face up when you're firing a blaster. And you were ready to fight Skywalker when you found out what he did to me."

She kissed Rey's forehead before she continued. "And also, you're so unbelievably beautiful. I don't think I've ever met a woman as drop-dead gorgeous as you are. And with the new robes and your hair down, I just... is it possible to be double gay?"

Rey let out a rather unflattering snort as she laughed, gently patting on Aliana's shoulder. "If it is, then count me as double gay too," she said as her laughter began to ebb. "I knew I was in love with you before I even knew I prefer women. You're beautiful, dependable, and caring. Whenever you talked about the Force or Jedi and Sith philosophy, I hung on every word. It's so mesmerizing hearing you talk about things you are passionate about. Seeing you fumble with simple mechanical stuff is also insanely adorable. I will never forget the look of frustration on your face when we first attempted maintenance on the engine together. I've never felt more at home in someone else's arms than I have in yours. I never have to worry about putting up any facades around you. You make me smile, you make me swoon, and you make me feel safe. I couldn't imagine myself with anyone else."

"Rey..." Aliana whispered, her eyes starting to water, "That's so-"

"If you guys are done practicing your wedding vows, I'd like to remind you that I'm still here," Talon smirked, having returned partway through Aliana's soliloquy.

A Fake Reputation is All a Girl Has

“TZ-1719, get the recruits rounded up!” Phamsa barked.

The Trooper nodded and picked up her rifle, trudging outside into the yard. The camp was small and packed together, designed for efficiency over comfort. The gaggle of children, scared and worried, all turned their heads the moment they saw an armored figure with a gun.

The Trooper herself sighed. There were a few like her, but not numerous enough to do anything here. Something had always been whispering to her to run. To escape. A voice in the back of her head that objected whenever she was ordered to do... well anything. Nevertheless, she didn't have an opportunity... yet.

Behind one of the barrack tents, a few of the children were huddled in a small circle as one of them whispered tall tales to the others.

“And then, she outsmarted the Supreme Leader!” he whispered.

“No way,” a young girl said, “I heard the Supreme Leader killed her.”

“He almost did, but she got away,” the boy stressed. “And she'll be back to beat him again! I know it!”

“Wow,” the girl marveled. “You think when she does that she'll take us with her?”

“I'm sure she will!” The boy nodded. “The Jedi even held off the entire armada single-handedly! Just her against all those tanks! She was unstoppable, like the Sith!”

TZ felt her training begin to nag at her mind. It told her to snap these two out of their fantastical conversation and get them out in the yard with the others. Such magical thinking wasn't permitted in their ranks and would only lead to trouble.

Of course, that training was, once again, conflicted by the voices. The urgings to let them carry on. To pretend she didn't see them and allow them to dream of a future. A future away from... this. She turned her back on them and returned to the others. What difference were two kids going to make?

The boy got up and hurried off to find a hiding place to avoid the wrath of the guards as they did their patrols. The girl on the other hand stayed there. She stood up, looking up at the sky at the Star Destroyer that loomed overhead like an omen of death and destruction. Thinking about the Sith and the Jedi and how they'd stood alone against hordes of First Order troopers, how the Jedi had crushed an AT-AT with her mind and the Sith had stalled a superweapon, she lifted her hand toward the ship and imagined herself ripping it out of the sky.

Nothing.

She sighed and looked down at a rock, reaching out and pulling it with the Force to her hand. She tossed it around before dropping it and rushing off to find a hiding place.

One day. One day she'd get away from here. She was sure of it. Now more than ever.

“Good training session, hon,” Aliana said as she kissed Rey’s cheek, the two of them exhausted and sweaty from a day’s workout. Aliana even more so, as exercising with healing injuries had proven more difficult. “You’re so much more powerful than when we were on the Supremacy, I’m impressed.”

Rey smiled and kissed Aliana in return. "Thanks. I had a magnificent teacher," she said with an airy laugh. The two of them walked over to where they laid their heavy gear before training. Rey pulled out a simple rag from her piles of things and began wiping herself off.

“You flatter me,” Aliana smiled as she simply grabbed the hem of her tunic and lifted it up to wipe her face. As she did, Rey caught a full view of Aliana’s toned stomach. The Sith had a very athletic build. Not too much muscle, but enough to be noticeable when she wanted it to be.

Rey was staring. She knew she was staring and she knew she should stop but she found herself unable to. It wasn't enough that Aliana's midsection was so pleasantly defined but the intensity of their workout meant that her dark skin was glistening with sweat. Rey felt the rag slip from her hands as she continued to gawk at Aliana, the only imperfection she could see being the small but deep scar just shy of her diaphragm.

Aliana glanced up at her and smiled, and then her smile faltered when she noticed Rey was focused so intently on her midsection. She giggled a little at how blatantly Rey was staring at her and leaned back on a workbench a little, stretching out while she continued wiping her face.

Rey bit her lip as she continued to watch shamelessly. The way Aliana's muscles flexed and stretched ever so slightly with her movements nearly had her mouth watering. She was so enraptured by the sight she hadn't realized Aliana took notice of her gandering.

“See anything you like, Kitten?” Aliana asked as she lowered her tunic’s hem from her face.

Rey squeaked, startled by Aliana's silky smooth words snapping her from her self induced trance. "I-! I'm... I'm just... happy that... you're looking healthier now," Rey offered.

“Really? Looking *healthier* is that it?” Aliana asked with a wry smirk.

"Yeah!" Rey said with a nervous smile. "You aren't skin and bones anymore. It's... it's nice seeing you so... healthy." Her hands wrung at her sides, the sweat continuing to trickle down her face.

“Are you sure it’s not something else?” Aliana purred as she beckoned Rey closer.

Rey swallowed the lump in her throat as she silently obeyed. Her steps were brisk, closing the distance between them quickly. Those perfectly tones, glistening abs were just within reach now. She could touch them if she so desired. "Well... I mean you are always beautiful," Rey said almost sheepishly.

“You flatter me.” Aliana reached out and took Rey’s hand, guiding it to lay her palm flat against her abdomen. “How’s that feel, Kitten?”

Rey's breath caught in her throat. Her eyes went wide as she felt Aliana's smooth modestly sculpted midsection beneath her hand. "It... it feels good," she managed to say. "...healthy."

Aliana leaned forward and gently brushed her lips over Rey’s, almost teasingly. “You know, if you wanted to touch my stomach, all you had to do was say so...” she purred.

"I..." Rey was trembling, her hand all but quaking against Aliana's abs. "I wasn't sure if that was... weird, or not."

"Is it weird to think your girlfriend is hot?" Aliana cooed, pulling Rey closer and kissing her neck.

Rey shuddered, her legs almost giving out when she felt Aliana's mouth on her throat. She brought her other hand around the Sith's back, clinging to her tunic like a life line. "I... guess that sounds a little silly," she admitted with a small huff of laughter.

"You know you can touch me, right?" Aliana asked as she kissed Rey's cheek and held her in a far more comforting way. "That won't invalidate what you said about not being ready."

"...Okay," she said, feeling a layer of discomfort she didn't realize was there simply slide off her shoulders. Her hands set to exploring. It wasn't just her abs. Aliana's entire body was covered in the gentle tone of muscles. They were there but they weren't massive. They didn't betray the thin, almost demure figure she had. Aliana had a very athletic build. Like a runner, or maybe a dancer. "...You have a very nice body," she said with a smile.

"Thank you, I made it myself," Aliana chuckled softly as she wrapped her arms around Rey's shoulders and kissed the taller woman's neck. "You know, you're pretty gorgeous yourself."

"Not like you," Rey said softly, running her hands up the back of Aliana's thighs.

"You're right. You're a different kind of gorgeous," Aliana purred as she curled her fingers in Rey's hair. "You look so... wild and powerful. Like you should be sitting on a throne overlooking a city planet. Your arms are so firm, I feel like you might break me if you squeeze me too hard..." Aliana bit her lip as she reached an arm down to grasp Rey's bicep.

Rey couldn't help but smile as a deep blush grew on her cheeks. "If either of us deserves to sit on a throne, it's you," Rey said, curling her arms around the small of Aliana's back. "You're just so... so poised and regal. You can make others who tower over you fall to their knees. You are an Empress, Alie."

Aliana barely managed to resist the urge to laugh. "Me an Empress? That's nice of you to say, but I respectfully disagree," she giggled. Leaning in, she captured Rey's lips in a kiss and pulled her close, mewling softly at feeling the Jedi's tough and calloused hands running down her back.

Rey moaned gently into the kiss, instinctively pulling Aliana flush against her. They were both still soaked in perspiration, but they didn't care. The growing heat between them was enthralling. Aliana's hands dropped from Rey's arms and came to rest on her shoulders when she felt Rey pull her in, the sensation of being held by her Jedi one that she had grown very fond of.

"You're... so strong..." she whimpered with each breath.

"You like my strength don't you?" Rey mused, her grip on Aliana tightening slightly.

Aliana let out the tiniest moan, "Yes... I really do," she cooed.

Rey felt a mischievous smile grow on her face. Suddenly one arm dipped behind Aliana's legs, allowing her to lift the Sith, bridal style. Rey flashed her a cheeky grin before making their way back to the Fury, their gear following behind in her telekinetic grip.

Aliana blushed furiously and laid her head on Rey's shoulder. "Where are you taking me, beautiful?" She tried to sound coy but being carried by Rey made her stammer a little.

"To the refresher," Rey said teasingly. "My Empress needs a shower."

Aliana's expression grew unamused. "Wow, how romantic," she said sarcastically, though she didn't lift her head from Rey's shoulder and in fact snuggled in closer.

"Aw don't be like that, Alie," Rey pouted before planting a tender kiss on the Sith's cheek. "You do look awfully fetching wrapped in a towel and covered in steam."

Aliana grumbled and kissed Rey's cheek in return, wrapping her arms around her shoulders. "That's just because I'm naked and you desperately want me," she teased.

"Doesn't mean I'm not right," Rey smiled as she carried Aliana up the docking ramp of the Fury. Even as the airlock opened and the two were well within the ship's flight deck, Rey still seemed hesitant to put her down.

"You know, I could get used to this," Aliana cooed, kissing Rey's neck and shifting slightly in her arms.

"Does that mean you'd like me to carry you everywhere now?" Rey teased, holding Aliana closer to her. "Shall I walk into the War Room with you in my arms and carry on like it's normal?"

"Well maybe not *everywhere*. It'd ruin my reputation as the ruthless Dark Lady," Aliana cooed.

"Ah, we wouldn't want *that*," Rey smirked.

"Well a fake reputation is all a girl has."

"Not true," Rey said, brushing her lips against Aliana's neck. "You have me."

Aliana moaned softly and squeezed Rey's neck tighter, her head leaning back. "Mmm, that's right. And you are *lovely*."

Rey hummed in appreciation as they made their way to the refresher. Reluctantly she managed to put Aliana down, sitting her atop a small counter before she sank down to one knee. She set to work disconnecting the cybernetic leg just beneath her knee. As it detached she placed a tender kiss in her leg where flesh met metal. "Will you be okay showering on your own?" She asked, hoping to sound more concerned than aroused.

"Yeah, I should be fine," Aliana purred. "Unless you wanted to join me."

Rey felt her cheeks flush red once more. "...Would... would that be okay?" She asked.

"I was about to ask you that," Aliana said, her seductive expression falling as she gently cupped Rey's cheek. "Nothing has to happen if you don't want it to."

"Okay," Rey said, a wave of comfort washing over her. The idea of this was much easier when she knew nothing sexual was required.

"... I'd like to wash you."

Aliana bit her lip slightly and pulled Rey in by the tunic. “I said nothing had to happen, but that doesn’t mean I’m not going to enjoy this,” she purred.

Vaax stood up as his ship came out of orbit over Odessen and Caij started scanning the surface. The small cluster of ships around the planet made it clear that *someone* was settled here and was building a fleet.

“We got anything?” he asked.

“Not sure,” Caij said, looking over the readings. “Most of it’s lifeform readings. Any signs of tech or civilization are few and far between. Most of its reading as pretty ancient.”

“What about this fleet here? There’s got to be a base on the surface if they’re all in orbit,” Vaxx suggested. “C’mon, what do I pay you for?”

Caij scoffed and looked over the scans again. “Hmm... terrain is pretty all over the place. They might be bunkered someplace that wouldn’t show up on a planetary scan. We’d probably need probes to pinpoint it.”

“Clever kids,” Vaax mused as he paced around the bridge. “Those ships at any risk of detecting us?”

“Most of those cruisers don’t look military grade. Our cloaking should slip past them.” Cajin looked over on another end of the display making sure their ship was still cloaked before returning to the controls. “There’s a location near a potential spot where we can land undetected. Taking us down.”

“Good. I need to find their base before we can make any advancements,” Vaax said, returning to his seat. “And find out what’s so special about these kids. If anything.”

“I’ve deployed the Sith Fleet to the borders of Republic Space to fortify their defenses,” Aliana said as she looked down at the holo-map in the war room. “They’ll patrol for a week and then return to escort more supply ships.”

“So... we’re officially part of the Sith now?” Finn asked, looking around the war room. “I mean, I’m not complaining. I just want to know if we’ve officially... rebranded.”

“Does that make us the Sith Resistance?” Poe added. “Sounds like that could confuse people. Like we’re resisting against the Sith and not the First Order, y’know?”

“I’m going to have a stroke...” Leia muttered, rubbing her eyes.

“No, the Sith Fleet belongs to me,” Aliana smirked as she leaned on Rey, her hastily cobbled together leg starting to irritate her knee. “The Sith Empire are now your allies.”

“Who ever thought we’d reach a point in our lives where that statement was encouraging,” Amilyn said with a smile before turning to Rose. “Admiral Tico, you said you had something for us?”

“Yes,” Rose said, tapping some buttons on the holo-terminal, causing the star map to shift to a different sector. “We’ve sent some probes to some of the nearby worlds in wildspace. A few of

them show signs of old civilizations. The tech has fallen into disrepair over the centuries, but is still good for scrap. I was hoping Master Rey could lead a scavenge team to try and collect as much valuable material as we could find.”

“I can do that,” Rey nodded. “I’ll just need a good cargo ship and a few people who can haul and some others who can disassemble things delicately.”

“I’ll radio Talon to give you a cargo ship and a few fighters for protection,” Aliana nodded, kissing Rey’s cheek.

“Awww, you’re the sweetest,” Rey cooed, nuzzling against Aliana.

“Anything for my kitten,” Aliana whispered into Rey’s ears, earning a delighted shiver.

“Should we clear the room? Give them a moment?” Poe quipped.

“We can’t clear the room every time they get distracted,” Leia huffed, snapping her fingers in their direction. “Excuse me, you two? There’s still a war going on.”

“Haven’t you ever heard the phrase ‘All is fair in love and war’?” Aliana said with a smirk. “There’s room for both here.”

“So,” Rose prompted, trying to get a handle on her wide smile. “We’ll have Rey lead the scavenging party at these locations.” A handful of planets were highlighted on the holo map. “Once the cargo ship is sent back to Odessen with one haul, the other ships will secure the next planet and gather the materials when it comes back. Rinse and repeat.”

“Alright, just give me a good team of engineers and haulers and I’ll be ready to go,” Rey smiled as she kissed Aliana’s forehead before letting go of her to run off to prepare. Aliana stood there smiling as she waved goodbye to her.

“With that settled, there is one other matter I wish to propose before we are adjourned for the day,” Amilyn said, stepping with the center of the war room. “Between Amorosa, Talon, Rey and Finn, we have some one of the most well rounded collection of Force users the galaxy has ever seen in years. I propose an operation that will allow us to expand such ranks. We will have our contacts in the core worlds alert us to the presence of any Force sensitives, we recruit them, and train them to use the Force however they please. Be it Light or Dark or something in between.”

“How are they supposed to find Force Sensitives? You need a Force User to do that,” Aliana spoke up, stepping closer to the holo-map. “And all four of us are busy fighting a war.”

“We’re experimenting on new detection methods,” Amilyn replied. “Some of our contacts have access to medical records. If those records have blood samples on file, we can search them for Midi-Chlorian counts. Some places with surveillance devices can see active displays of force sensitivity like telekinesis or augmented physicality. All these methods are still somewhat experimental but if we devote time and resources to this operation, we should have a workable system before long.”

“One of us is still going to have to go and get these new recruits,” Aliana explained. “Explain to them the depths of the Force and offer them the chance to come train. And Rey’s already got a lot on her plate, as does Finn.”

“True,” Amilyn said, nodding in concession. “Before Talon and your fleet came along, I had my doubts that this operation would prove fruitful given how much left we still had to do. With that problem alleviated however, I suspect that we might be able to devote time to this. Any responsibilities that would interfere with this could be entrusted by the most qualified supplicants.”

“Well, I could go and recruit new Force Users to-”

“No,” Leia spoke up, shaking her head. “The Republic has ordered you to stay out of Republic Space. We’ll have to send someone else.”

Aliana closed her eyes and took a deep breath before forcing a smile to her face. “Well, it looks like it’ll fall to Lord Talon then.”

“Possible, though I’m not sure the Republic will welcome the presence of *another* Sith any better,” Amilyn said with a frown, stroking her chin. “Finn, do you think you could be entrusted with such a task.”

“I mean, maybe,” Finn shrugged. “But I’m still newer to the whole Force thing than anyone else. Technically speaking I’m more of Pala... Pawa...”

“Padawan,” Leia corrected.

“That, yeah. I don’t think I’d be the best choice,” Finn concluded.

“The fact is, you need a Master to gather new Force Sensitives,” Aliana explained. “We have more Force Sensitives, but only one Master. Me.”

“...Alright. We’ll table it for now,” Leia said. “Perhaps as relations with the Republic continue, they will make amendments for Amorosa. Until then, we should focus on honing the skills of the Force sensitives we have.”

“On that note, Rey’s training is coming along really well,” Aliana said, deciding to just move on and deal with Leia another time. “But her raw power is becoming uncontrollable. She’s overloaded twelve power conduits with Force Lightning even when she isn’t trying to. It’s becoming increasingly difficult for her to do the more precise exercises because her sheer power is becoming so overwhelming.”

“That’s concerning,” Leia said with a frown. “Have you attempted to shift her lessons towards precision and focus? Perhaps relying on her engineering experience as an association?”

“I have, but the problem still exists,” Aliana nodded as she looked around the war room. “Could everyone except Leia please leave? What I’m about to say is classified.”

Everyone looked around and shrugged in confusion and apprehension as they started to file out of the room. Before Poe, Finn and Rose could follow, Aliana reached out and stopped them. “Hang on, you guys can stay. You’re her friends.”

“Oh... alright,” Finn said as the three of them walked back into the room. “So what’s up?”

Aliana waited until everyone else was out of the room and then used the Force to seal the doors shut. “Alright. So I’ve been doing some digging around in Rey’s head the last few days and I

noticed something. The Force Bond with Kylo Ren isn't just open, I can't actually close it anymore."

"The shielding technique you used isn't working?" Amilyn said, her expression one of growing dread.

"Is the bond getting stronger somehow?" Leia followed up.

"You had Rey's permission when you dug around in her head, right?" Rose asked, not wanting to sound accusatory, but concerned for the well being of her friend.

"First of all, yes I did," Aliana said, casting a dismissive glance at Rose. "I always have her permission, Rose. I did the first time, I do every time. She trusts me. Second of all, I can't say the bond is getting stronger because it's different from a typical Force Bond."

She hit a button on the holoterminal and an image of two humanoids appeared with a line between them.

"Force Bonds are just links between two people," she explained. "They have their benefits and their downsides, but by and large those two people remain the same. What's happening here is very different."

She hit another button and the two figures were replaced by a holo-image of mists swirling around each other.

"There's another kind of bond where two people's spirits are essentially fused together. When one grows more powerful, the other grows more powerful and vice versa. I've examined it inside and out, and this is the bond Rey has with Kylo Ren," Aliana explained. "The Force has stitched them into one soul."

The rest of the room winced at the thought of it.

"Like some freaky... homunculus," Poe grimaced.

"So it's a feedback loop of Force energy," Rose said. "They're both making each other stronger."

Aliana nodded. "And the two of them are already strong in the Force as it is. Rey's mastery and skill means she can wield Kylo Ren's strength more reliably than he can, and both of them are causing each other to exponentially grow in power. This is why Rey can't seem to do anything but cause mass destruction, because now she has strength in the Force on par with Lord Tenebrae and doesn't know what to do with it. And she's only going to grow even stronger."

"Tenebrae?" Poe asked.

"Ancient Sith," Aliana explained. "A literal world devourer."

"Oh..." Poe's eyes went wide at the prospect. "That's... pretty powerful."

"Yeah. The Force has been trying to bring them together and now it's becoming more of a problem than it previously was," Aliana huffed. "The worst part is that if we kill Kylo Ren before we cut this bond permanently, we could do irreparable damage to her in the long term."

“Seriously!?” Amilyn exclaimed in horror. “Wha- Can we even sever this bond? You said you’ve been unable to block it.”

“There are ways to cut these kind of bonds, but bonds that go this deep are difficult,” Aliana explained. “This is on a primal, subconscious level. Rey might openly and emphatically revile what the Force is doing, but that doesn’t mean that the deepest pit of her subconscious will go along with that.”

“Would physical distance help alleviate the problem?” Leia asked. “If we tried to keep her from Ren, would that do anything?”

“If Ren is getting stronger too, we might need her if he ever shows up on the front lines again,” Poe said.

“Physical distance doesn’t do anything. The two of them can appear before each other regardless of how distant they are. Ren used this to torment Rey on Ahch To.” Aliana shook her head. “The fact is, one of their souls has to be willing to part with the other. Hard to do when the Force is holding them in place. Someone has to go in and pull them apart. Someone Rey’s soul would accept and be drawn to.”

“And that someone, naturally, is you,” Leia noted, gesturing to Aliana.

“Sounds good,” Finn nodded. “Let’s do that then.”

Aliana fell quiet and looked down at the holoterminal, wringing her hands nervously. “There... there’s no guarantee that I can do it...”

The room fell uncomfortably silent for a moment.

“...Even so, you still have a better chance at pulling this off than any of us,” Leia said plainly. “Rey accepts and is drawn to you like no one else. You’re the best suited for this job. If it doesn’t work... well then, at least we’ll know that we did all we could.”

Aliana didn’t say anything and continued staring down at her hands. She gave a noncommittal shrug and turned around, quickly leaving the room. The others looked confused as they all glanced at each other.

“What got her so down suddenly?” Poe asked, raising an eyebrow as he watched her leave.

“Should one of us talk to her?” Finn asked.

“I’ll find her in the mess hall later,” Rose offered. “See what’s bothering her.”

“...Well alright then,” Amilyn said. “If that’s everything, then meeting adjourned.”

Rey wiped her brow as she sat back from her workbench. It was done. Several weeks of gathering materials and working every single ounce of free time she had and it was finally done.

She gave the cybernetic leg a final look over for any missed spots. It was a completely enclosed structure, with all the joints and mechanical components completely shielded from view with a set of interlocking duranium and impervium plates that would extend and contract as the leg did. The entire structure had the look of a black, metal boot with a few golden trimmings alongside it. As

she opened a single plate she gave a look to the insulation. The entire leg's electronics were coated in a thick, insulating gel that made it completely waterproof.

Both the enclosed plates and waterproofing meant that it was built for convenience above everything else. Aliana wouldn't have to take the leg off to go to bed or shower, and the lack of external machinery meant that she wasn't at risk of having its complicated internal systems interfering with her daily life.

Rey was pleased with herself and couldn't wait to show it to her. She was certain Aliana would love it.

When she heard footsteps, one of them having a heavier clunk, aboard the Fury, she quickly wrapped the prosthetic in a long velvet cloth, rising from the workbench and making her way to the flight deck. Sure enough, she saw Aliana enter. Her slumped shoulders and far away look in her eyes showed that she was distressed about something, causing a pang in Rey's heart to flare up. She pushed past the feelings, knowing her gift would cheer Aliana up plenty.

She stepped briskly up to her Sith and smiled, the bundle of velvet in her hands. "I have a surprise for you," she said in a singsong tone.

Aliana looked up and gave a half-hearted "Hmm?" As she sat down on the sofa and watched Rey carry a large object wrapped in cloth over to her.

"I've had this idea since you were unconscious," Rey explained sitting beside her with the bundle placed in her lap. "I wanted to make you something that was both useful and showed just how much you mean to me."

Aliana perked up a little, tilting her head curiously. "What is it? What have you got?" She asked, sliding closer to her.

"Open it and find out," Rey said plainly, placing the bundle in Aliana's lap.

Aliana looked at the bundle curiously as she parted the wrappings of the velvet cloth. As she pulled away the last fold her eyes went wide upon seeing the leg. Rey looked on, trying to let her expectant enthusiasm to show too heavily on her face.

"Rey, is... did you..." Aliana ran her fingers over the leg. It looked so regal and sleek. "Is this really for me?"

"Absolutely," Rey said with a smile as she placed an arm around Aliana's shoulder. "I hate the leg 2V gave you too. It's so clunky and unlike you. You deserve a cybernetic that's just as functional and elegant as you are." She placed a gentle kiss on Aliana's cheek and looked down at the leg. "Took me quite a while to get it just right, but it's ready for use. It's durable, waterproof and very user friendly. The most maintenance you'll ever need to do is tightening a bolt here and there."

Aliana put a hand over her mouth as she looked up at Rey, tears starting to well up in her eyes. "Rey... I... that's so sweet," she whispered, setting the leg on the table and leaning in to hug the Jedi as tightly as she could. "I can't believe you went to all this trouble for me..."

"It was no trouble at all," Rey said, rubbing Alina's back up and down. "It was honestly a lot of fun to do. I love a good passion project now and again."

“I... I really needed that right now,” Aliana whispered quietly. “You’re so sweet, and so good to me. Thank you so much.”

“Anything for you, Alie. I love you,” Rey kissed the top of Aliana’s head and held onto her tightly for a few more minutes before pulling away enough to look into the Sith’s beautiful red eyes. “Want me to help put it on?”

Aliana pulled back from her and wiped her eyes, nodding. “Yes please.”

Rey smiled and slid off of the couch, kneeling on the floor. Carefully, she powered down the cybernetic Aliana was wearing before unlatching it. Once it was disconnected from the base, she made a show of lifting it up with the force and crushing it in her grip. “Done with that leg,” she said dismissively before tossing to the other end of the flight deck.

She then grabbed the new prosthetic off of the table and ever so cautiously slid it into the receptacles on the metal base. As it latched into place, the mechanical limb powered on, syncing with Aliana’s nervous system.

Aliana immediately felt sensation in the leg and gave it a few experimental wiggles. It felt more natural, more cooperative to her. She stood up and put weight on it, and was satisfied to see it didn’t give or wobble. It was firm, grounded. Everything she had in her old leg. She took a few steps forward and it was like she’d never been dismembered.

“Rey, it’s... it’s perfect!” She smiled as she turned and looked at her girlfriend. “I don’t know what to say...”

“You don’t need to say anything,” Rey said, rising up to pull Aliana back into a hug. “You mean everything to me. I’ll do everything I can to make your life easier, because I know you do the same for me. That’s how this works.”

Aliana melted into the hug and kissed Rey’s cheek. “Yeah, I would. I really would...” She squeezed her tighter and buried her face in the Jedi’s neck. “I love you so much, Rey. You mean everything to me.”

“I love you too, Alie,” Rey purred. “Just wait. Once this war is over, it’s gonna be you and me being happy together. No Republic idiocy. No grease stains terrorizing us. I promise.”

“I can’t wait for that,” Aliana smiled, pulling Rey by the hand in the direction of their quarters. “Now come with me.”

Rey’s grin remained, but shifted into something slightly nervous as she realized where the Sith was taking her. “...Alie, didn’t we talk about-?”

“Oh, no!” Aliana said, stroking Rey’s shoulder reassuringly. “I just want to take a nap. Today’s been quite the day.”

“Oh!” Rey said, feeling clarity and relief wash over her as she enthusiastically followed Aliana into the room.

“Sorry hon, should have said that to start with,” Aliana giggled a little.

The turret was decimated by the power of its own blaster fire ricochet back at itself. The last turret in the makeshift training room was rendered unusable.

Kylo Ren felt an uncomfortable mix of pride and frustration. Pride in that his practice of Soresu had protected him from the hail of turret fire he set up for himself. Frustration in that he knew such skill wasn't enough. Deflecting blaster fire was easy, more so now with his increasing technique. Deflecting the fast and decisive strikes of Rey or Amorosa's lightsabers were far more challenging.

There was little in his arsenal he had to further hone his skills, which were in desperate need of honing. Raw power wasn't enough anymore. That much he learned the extremely painful way. He needed technique. He needed control. Control he was steadily losing the more his power seemed to grow. A deadly trap to have found himself in. By becoming stronger and stronger, he robbed himself of the skill he needed to best his greatest enemies.

He sat down on an upturned crate and looked at his lightsaber, trying to think about his previous defeats. Amorosa dedicated herself to lightsaber combat, but she managed to fight effectively with basic Force powers. Now that he thought about it, no report about her indicated she did anything other than telekinesis, mind tricks and lightning.

Control. Control... he needed control...

His eyes glanced to a small piece of twine on the floor, and then an idea struck him. Picking it up with the Force, he concentrated and focused on tying the string into a knot. Something delicate that needed precise movements, and would fail if he tried to just brute-force through it. For an hour he sat there tying and untying the string, trying to go faster with each successful attempt. It wasn't much, but eventually it was effortless. And it gave him more ideas to practice the control he needed.

In the absence of a teacher... trivial tasks would have to suffice.

Kylo Ren finally emerged from his quarters late into the night at Hux's insistence. As he trudged onto the bridge, he slapped the general across the back of the head. "What do you want?"

Hux turned around and gave him a dirty look. "Our spies have just informed me that a massive fleet rose up in the Outer Rim and took off in the direction of Wild Space. Preliminary reports stated they called themselves the Sith Fleet."

Ren's frown deepened. "Where did she manage to hide a fleet like that in the Outer Rim?" he asked.

"The Fleet doesn't seem to have any... uniformity to it," Hux explained. "It's just a mass of cruisers and fighters that chose to coordinate into a Navy."

"So you're saying the Sith rise a fleet out of volunteers overnight?" Ren asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Most unlikely," Hux said, his tone unmistakably dry. "Our intelligence states that Amorosa has amassed a great number of contacts in the criminal underworld over the course of years. These 'volunteers' may very well be the favors she's calling in against us."

Kylo Ren narrowed his eyes slightly, silently going over the information he was given. Hux was somewhat surprised that their Supreme Leader remained as composed as he was, half expecting a

piece of computer equipment to be smoldering bits by now.

“Reorganize our fleet,” Kylo said finally. “Have destroyers at the ready to intercept any ships coming from Wild Space and use what’s left over to keep the pressure on the Republic. If the Sith fleet ever retreats, track it. If they are destroyed, search the wreckage for anything useful.”

Hux raised his eyebrows, mildly surprised. “Very well, Supreme Leader,” he said, waving to a comms officer to carry out the orders. “There is another matter. One of our training facilities is on the border of Wild Space, and Phasma has reported... an uprising.”

Kylo Ren was silent, taking a moment to take a deep steadying breath. “And how has that come to pass, exactly?” he asked.

“Several of the troopers appear to have shirked their orders and started attacking. They escaped in a transport with half the children from the barracks,” Hux explained, looking with disdain at the holomap. “TZ-1719 led the escape. And what’s worse is that some of the children she took with her are reported to be Force Sensitive.”

Kylo Ren’s lips pursed into a thin line. This was not good news. “...TZ-1719 was their leader, you said. So there was no sign of the traitor at the facility?”

“None,” Hux shook his head. “We have ships in pursuit, but it appears she and her cohorts were acting alone.”

“Then we still have time to catch them before the Sith discovers them,” he said, silently thanking that saving grace. “The last thing we need is Amorosa training those children in the Dark Side.”

“Indeed. One Sith is irritating enough,” Hux agreed as he returned to the front of the bridge.

TZ-1719 dropped out of hyperspace, the Hyperdrive smoking and showing failures on the control panel and cursed the freighter itself. “Get someone on that Hyperdrive before the First Order discovers us!” She yelled as she put the ship into full throttle. She had to keep moving, even if it was sub-light speeds. As soon as the ship was moving, she turned to the comms channel.

It was a risk. She’d likely be picked up by the First Order, but she had to take it. She opened all channels and started to speak into the mic. “This is the Dauntless sending out a distress call on all emergency channels! We’re fleeing the First Order and need assistance! There are children on board this vessel, repeat there are children on board this vessel!”

To her surprise, the holoprojector came online and she was met with a woman in a dark robe and curly hair.

“This is Darth Amorosa, what’s your name?” the woman asked.

TZ’s eyes widened at the sight. Darth Amorosa. The Sith Lord who had routinely defeated the Supreme Leader and even survived the one triumph he had over her. She could hardly believe that the Sith truly survived, let alone answer their call for help.

“This is TZ-1719!” she replied after her brief moment of stunned silence.

“I didn’t ask for your number, I asked for your name,” Amorosa said, more firmly this time.

“...I... I don’t have one,” TZ said with a shrug. “The escapees and I are all from the First Order training facility. All we have are our numbers.”

“Send me your coordinates and put the ship in full stop and I’ll be en-route,” Amorosa nodded in understanding. “I’ll expect you to think of a name for yourself by the time I get there. In the meantime, power down all systems except for life support. Go dark and you’ll be harder for the First Order to find.”

“Understood,” TZ said, disengaging the thrusters before fiddling with the panel in front of the holoprojector. “Sending the coordinates now. We’ll stay out of sight until you arrive. ...Thank you... my lord.”

“Just Amorosa is fine. Hold tight, I’ll be there within a few hours,” Amorosa said before she vanished from sight.

TZ sat back and watched as the ship powered down. Within a few seconds they were adrift in space, with the only power going to Life Support. Even that was at a quarter of its strength. By her calculations, she had three hours before she would have to power the ship again. The ship was bathed in crushing darkness, with barely any light coming from outside. No stars nearby, which meant no light.

It was an eerie feeling, she thought as she headed into the cabin where her friends were tending to the children.

“Ma’am?” one girl piped up. “What’s happenin’?”

“Everything’s fine, little one,” TZ said encouragingly, taking a knee to meet the girl closer to eye level. “Someone has answered our call for help and are coming to save us. We’re just powering down so that the First Order doesn’t find us before they do.” She placed a hand gently on the girl’s shoulder and smiled. “We’re going to be okay.”

“Who’s comin’?” the girl asked, inching closer to TZ.

“Darth Amorosa,” she said, recalling that this girl was one of the children who was mesmerized by the tale of the Sith Lord. “She’s coming to save us.”

There was a torrent of whispering among the kids as they went from disbelief, to surprise, to glee.

“Is the Jedi coming too?” the girl asked hopefully.

“She just might,” TZ answered, smiling at the hushed bout of excitement she heard among the children.

“We’re saved!”

“They’re gonna save us!”

“We’re not going back!”

Despite the looming darkness both in and around the ship, the air inside became the cheeriest it’s ever been. The children were bouncing and singing while the older escapees were laughing and sighing in relief. TZ even saw one pair in the corner sharing a loving kiss. Hope was what prompted them all to risk everything to leave the First Order, and now, the ship was rife with it.

It was an inspiration they needed. Now more than ever.

Not Happy That Rey Chose Me Instead

Terror gripped the small freighter as the children inside watched with fear as the Star Destroyer dropped out of Hyperspace. It was far enough away that having gone dark meant they couldn't be seen, but now they were in a dangerous game of cat and mouse. TZ, having decided to call herself Jannah, was now huddled up in the back of the ship with the children while her squadmates held their guns ready.

"Where's the Resistance?" one girl asked as she looked up at Jannah. "I'm scared."

"They'll be here soon, little one," Jannah said, trying to force a soft, reassuring tone into her voice despite her own nerves. "We're going to be okay. The First Order can't find us like this."

The girl managed a nod but resumed quivering in fear as she and the other children huddled close together.

The Destroyer outside crept closer and the tension in the freighter rose considerably. The closer they got, the more likely it was they would be spotted on scanners or even by eye. What was worse, the small amounts of power they were using wasn't enough to sustain life support and they would need to power on soon or they were dead anyway. Jannah felt powerless just sitting there waiting for help to arrive, unable to do anything. She wished she could have stolen a corvette or a combat freighter at the very least, rather than a troop transport.

Just as the Destroyer was about to get too close for comfort, there was a flash and a crack as another ship dropped out of Hyperspace and started immediately opening fire on the Destroyer.

Jannah rushed to the viewport, taking a moment to encourage the children to stay where they were, and looked out at the sight. The Destroyer was locked in a firefight with a single corvette and, surprisingly enough, the corvette was holding its own. She recognized the ship from several reports regarding Darth Amorosa. That was the Fury. Her ship. The Sith was here.

She watched, as the smaller ship proceeded to fly circles around the Destroyer, leaving a trail of blaster fire and explosions in its wake. Whenever it seemed that the cruiser could lock down on the Fury with turbolasers, the assault was either evaded or countered with one in kind. Before Jannah realized it, the turrets on the Destroyer's port side were all completely destroyed.

It seemed that those on board had ascertained that continuing such a battle would not end well for them, as the Destroyer then disengaged and jumped to Hyperspace. The shuttle and the Fury were now alone.

Jannah couldn't believe what she'd just seen. This small corvette had run circles around a Star Destroyer in an attack pattern that seemed almost pre-planned as every single movement, evasion and shot was near perfect. She quickly powered on the main reactor and waited for the systems to boot up. When they did, she immediately received a holocall. Slamming the button with her fist, she looked at the projector with desperation.

"-morosa of the Sith Warship Fury, does anybody read me?" said the projection of Amorosa, starting to look concerned.

“We read you!” Jannah said, a look of sheer joy and relief on her face. “Thank you, Lord Amorosa! That Destroyer was getting rather close for comfort.”

“There’s no thanks needed,” Amorosa shook her head. “Now, about your name?”

“My na- Oh, right! I, uh... My name is Jannah!” She felt warmth creep into her cheeks as she bashfully hoped that sounded confident enough for the Sith’s liking.

“Nice to meet you, Janna. We’ll dock with your ship very shortly and bring you aboard,” Amorosa nodded. “Get your passengers ready, I’ll have a Jedi coming down to help you up.”

“Understood. Thank you again, Amorosa! You’re a literal lifesaver.” She closed the holocall before rushing back to her squadmates. “The Sith is here! We’ll be able to dock on her ship at any moment!”

They roared in celebration and excitement. The children began stepping out from the back of the ship, looks of wonder and hope on their face.

“Amorosa’s here?” the girl asked, her eyes as wide as her smile.

“Yes she is, she-” Jannah was cut off by a loud clunk overhead and the sound of something sliding into place before the top access port opened and a woman clad in a brown sleeveless vest dropped down onto the deck. She glanced around and noticed Jannah and smiled.

“I’m Rey, someone call for roadside assistance?” she snickered.

Jannah blinked, momentarily thrown by the woman’s nonchalance at the situation before speaking up. “Uh, yes. We did,” she nodded, stepping to the front of the group. “I’m Jannah and these are my fellow... defect-ees. We’ve decided to flee from the First Order and join the Resistance. You’re with Darth Amorosa?”

Rey nodded and held out a hand, taking Jannah’s and shaking it. “Alright, let’s get everyone onto the Fury and we can mingle later.”

One girl rushed up beside Jannah and looked onto Rey with absolute wonder. “You’re the Jedi who beat Kylo Ren!” she exclaimed gleefully.

Rey giggled and knelt down to the girl’s level. “Yes I am. What’s your name, sweetie?”

The girl opened her mouth to reply, but no answer came out. After a moment she just shrugged. “The others and I don’t have names.”

“Well, you’ll have a lot of time to find one,” Rey smiled as she stood up and reached her hand toward the access port. A ladder came down and locked into place on the floor. “C’mon, everybody up!”

Everyone aboard the ship nodded in understanding and scaled the ladder single file. The children were the first to board, followed by Jannah and each of her squadmates. Rey brought up the rear before dashing back to the cockpit. As the group looked around to get their new bearings, a droid walked up to Jannah.

“Greetings. I am 2V-R8. I serve Miss Alie and Miss Rey aboard this vessel and am programmed to assist any guests they bring aboard. How may I serve you.”

Jannah was quiet for a moment, unused to a droid sounding so... genuinely pleasant. "...Uh... thank you. I... I think I'm okay, but the children will need a place to rest. Is there anywhere aboard this ship where they can do that?"

"Miss Alie has portable lodgings so that the ship may serve as a temporary bunkhouse. I will get them settled at once, Miss..." the droid gestured to her expectantly.

"Jannah," she replied, a warm smile growing on her lips. It felt good to say her name. The name she chose for herself. "And thank you, 2V."

"You're most welcome Miss Jannah!" 2V nodded as he hurried to the cargo hold to fetch the bunks.

Jannah jumped when she felt a hand on her shoulder and whirled around to see Amorosa smiling at her. "Nice to finally meet you, Jannah. You holding up okay?"

"Y-Yes!" she exclaimed, still jittery from the start Amorosa just gave her. "Everyone is still a little shaken up from the decision to leave, but we're all okay."

She took a moment to simply look at Amorosa. Certainly much shorter than she was expecting, but still looked somehow formidable. Perhaps it was the blazing crimson eyes or the rather elegant looking cybernetic leg, but something about her suggested a fair amount of deadliness.

Not that Jannah was frightened. Far from it. The sight of such a formidable woman filled her with relief. "I cannot thank you enough for what you've done for us."

"Save kids AND get to chase a Star Destroyer away? That was like Life Day had come early," Amorosa smiled as she clapped Jannah on the shoulder. "So what happened? Why'd you turn and run from the First Order?"

Jannah's brow furrowed as she gave the question some thought. "...It just felt like the right thing to do," she said plainly. "We left because, somehow, we knew it wasn't where we belonged. It-It's hard to explain, but it feels like there was something in our heads, telling us to run. It felt like it was whispering and screaming at the same time."

"I'd say that was your conscience telling you that brainwashing kids is wrong, but the screaming sounds more like the Force," Amorosa rolled her eyes. "Nice to see it's meddling is good for something at least."

"The Force?" Jannah asked before shaking her head. "No. No, that can't be right. We're no Jedi. And we're definitely no Sith."

"You don't have to be in order to be Force Sensitive," Amorosa shook her head. "How do you think Jedi and Sith start out?"

Jannah's eyes darted about as a sheepish expression crossed her face. "...I suppose I haven't given it much thought," she admitted.

"Well give it as much as you need. I'm not accepting apprentices anytime soon, and Rey's not ready to train others yet either," Amorosa nodded as she stepped past Jannah and toward the cockpit. "C'mon. Come meet the other three."

Jannah followed after Amorosa wordlessly. It was almost fascinating how after only two exchanges, the Sith regarded her with such... familiarity. Was that common for Sith, or something unique to her. While it was too soon to say, she wasn't averse to finding out. She stepped into the cockpit and saw three other people, two men and one woman.

"Jannah, this is Poe Dameron, Finn, and Admiral Rose Tico," Amorosa said, gesturing to each one respectively.

"Nice to meet you all," Jannah said with a polite smile.

"You too," Finn said as he took a step forward. "It feels good to know that I wasn't the only one willing to leave the First Order."

Jannah's eyes widened. "You too?"

"FN-2187" Finn said with a nod.

"I heard about you," Jannah's eyes widened further. "You were shot out of the sky! They said you were dead and that it should be a lesson to all traitors!"

"Well I'll be more than happy to teach them a lesson instead," Finn responded proudly.

"Kripping hell you're corny," Poe snickered.

"Bite me," Finn hissed.

"With pleasure!" Poe hissed back.

"You'll have to excuse them," Amorosa snorted as she cast a glare to Finn and Poe. "Do I need to separate you two again?"

Finn grumbled. "...I mean, he started it."

Amorosa scoffed and playfully shoved Finn as Rey came into the cockpit. "You've already met Rey."

"I have," Jannah said with a smile. "I... I just can't believe I'm actually meeting you all! You're legends!"

"Oh, don't say that to Poe," Rose warned playfully. "That kind of talk goes right to his head."

"Goes right to Rey's too," Amorosa snickered.

"Hey!"

"You know I don't mean it, hon," Amorosa snickered as she pulled Rey closer and kissed her cheek.

"Oh!" Jannah exclaimed, her eyes widening with surprise for the umpteenth time. "Are you two... together?"

"Mhmm," Amorosa nodded as Rey kissed her forehead.

“I see why the First Order doesn’t like you,” Jannah said with a small huff of laughter.

“Surprisingly killing their high ranking officers bothers them less than macking on other women,” Rey huffed as she kissed Amorosa’s cheek and hugged her tightly.

“They have kriffing bizarre priorities,” Jannah said shaking her head. “Well, anyway. I still want to thank you all for accepting us. I know the children are the happiest of us all. They really do revere you two.”

“Really?” Amorosa raised an eyebrow as she ran her fingers through Rey’s hair. “That’s strange.”

“It’s true. They tell stories to each other about you two whenever they can.” Jannah’s smile became warmer as she looked back in the direction she last saw the children. “I think the battle of Crait is what inspired them the most. They learned that the First Order was not invincible. That there was a better life for them.”

“They heard about that? I would have thought the First Order would have tried to suppress that story,” Amorosa raised an eyebrow as she separated herself from Rey and looked at Jannah curiously.

Jannah shook her head. “Well if they intended to keep it quiet, they didn’t do a very good job. News of the battle trickled through our ranks over the months.”

“Good to hear. Dissent in the ranks is good for us,” Rey smiled.

“There’s certainly dissent. But we’re still lacking in the courage department,” Jannah said, her face falling slightly. “Even though there are those who know what we’re doing is wrong, not everyone is willing to stand up and do something about it. They think it’s smarter to just stick it out and not draw attention to ourselves. They don’t think fighting will do any good.”

“Well, we’ll have to change that,” Amorosa nodded as she clapped a hand to Jannah’s shoulder. “You can call me Aliana. That’s my real name.”

“Alright then, Aliana.” Jannah felt a smile return to her face as she mirrored Aliana’s gesture to her.

“Rescuing kids feels good,” Aliana smiled as she laid down beside Rey in their quarters. “Feels like I’m correcting old mistakes.”

“Oh you hush with that talk,” Rey said, placing a single finger on Aliana’s lips.

“What? I said it felt good,” Aliana huffed as she gently bit Rey’s finger.

Rey rolled her eyes, but the act was betrayed by her smile. “I meant about ‘old mistakes’. You have nothing to atone for over that.”

“I never said I did,” Aliana smiled as she pulled closer to Rey.

“Good. See that you don’t.” Rey nestled in the Sith’s embrace, the two of them fitting perfectly together like two components that were made for each other.

Aliana wrapped her arms around Rey's shoulders and cuddled her close. "You know it's still wild knowing that kid back then was you."

Rey chuckled softly. "Yeah. I kind of feel bad that I can't remember anything," she admitted before shifting her position to better look Aliana in the eyes. "I wasn't too bad, was I?"

"You were five," Aliana chuckled. "You'd just been abandoned. There's no such thing as too bad."

"I suppose that's true," Rey admitted sheepishly. "Still, what was I like?"

"Well, you were pretty upset. You cried for your mother a lot," Aliana said, holding tighter to Rey and kissing her forehead. "You settled down after the first night when I sang to you, but even then you weren't exactly happy. Especially after we brought you to Jakku."

Rey went over that information in her head, taking time to chew on it before she spoke. "What did you sing to me?"

"Just some song in Ancient Sith. It wasn't really child-friendly, but it wasn't like you could tell," Aliana shrugged as she kissed her forehead. "It was a song about slaughtering the weak."

Rey chuckled, holding Aliana tighter. "Calming a child with a song about death," she mused. "It's no wonder I have such an affinity for the Dark Side."

"If we're being honest, was it the song about death or was it the girl holding you and singing?" Aliana smirked wickedly as she ran her fingers down Rey's neck.

Rey shuddered pleasantly before giving Aliana a swat on the shoulder. "Oh you stop that. If Leia heard you talking like that, she'd think you planned to corrupt me years ago."

"Let her think that," Aliana grinned. "It makes no difference to me."

"Fair enough," Rey said, shaking her head before settling back down. "...Would you mind if you sang it to me again?" she asked after a beat of silence. "Just to see if it jogs any memories?"

"Oh uh... I suppose," Aliana said, a faint blush hitting her cheeks as she suddenly looked bashful.

"Aww, what's wrong, sweetheart?" Rey asked cheekily. "Not used to singing to an audience these days?"

"No not really," Aliana said, glancing away. "I can do it, just... don't laugh?"

"I promise I won't," Rey said, leaning up to kiss Aliana's cheek.

Aliana smiled and took a deep breath. Rey laid her head down on the Sith's chest as she started to sing. The words were alien and unfamiliar, but Rey felt herself drawn to Aliana's voice. It was hauntingly beautiful, almost like a chant or a hymn than a song.

Rey was mesmerized. She wasn't able to understand the words, only infer their meaning from what Aliana had told her. Still, hearing the eerie melody come from the Sith made it feel enchanting to listen to. She was oddly calmed by the song, prompting her to nuzzle against Aliana's chest. She could hear her voice crack occasionally, stifling a giggle at Aliana's nervousness.

As quickly as it had begun, it was over. Aliana's voice trailed off and she wrapped her arms tighter around Rey's shoulders, holding the Jedi close. "...So how was it?"

Rey was silent for a moment as she pondered. "...I think you were right," she said quietly before leaning back up to steal a kiss from Aliana. "It was the girl holding me and singing that did it."

Aliana blushed deeper and kissed Rey's forehead. "You were very small back then," she giggled softly.

"My how the tables have turned," Rey teased.

"Are you saying I'm short?" Aliana huffed, her lips scrunching up.

"Oh, of course not, Alie," Rey said with a lopsided grin. "Clearly, I'm just freakishly tall."

"That's better," Aliana smiled as she ran her fingers through Rey's hair. "You know... hearing that my mother wanted to take you with us feels... weird."

"Really? How so?" Rey asked curiously.

"Well I mean... we'd be like sisters," Aliana said. "Actually we'd just flat out BE sisters."

"...Oh, yeah." Rey said, her lips pursing into a thin line. "...That would be weird... at least, I think it would be." She looked down at herself and how close she was holding Aliana. "This isn't a very sister thing to do, is it?"

"Well on Naboo it is," Aliana snickered as she kissed Rey's forehead. "But no, it's not a very sister thing to do."

"Hmm..." Rey continued to ponder on the idea, her brow furrowed in contemplation. "...I think the weirdest part is that it might not be enough to stop me from feeling this way."

"Really?" Aliana cocked an eyebrow as she kissed Rey's hair.

"Really," Rey said with a confident smile. "I was clearly attached to you right from the start, and we're both too into women to at least not think about it if we grew up together."

"I guess..." Aliana said, looking nervous in stark contrast to Rey's confidence. "Especially after Motina died. That'd be weird though."

"Oh, absolutely," Rey agreed. "But hey. It's a big galaxy. Who's gonna judge us? The Force?"

"I guess. It's not like anyone would know," Aliana giggled, nuzzling into Rey's neck.

"Exactly," Rey smiled, brushing her fingers over Aliana's hair. "And if anyone asks, we'll tell them to mind their own damn business."

"Spirits, this is such a weird conversation," Aliana laughed as she laid her head on Rey's shoulder.

"...Yeah I guess it is," Rey admitted. "...But at the same time, I think it's kind of romantic."

"Well in that case there's a whole seedy underbelly of holonovels you might be interested in," Aliana said with a scoff.

Rey laughed and squeezed Aliana tighter, burying her face into her pretty curls. This conversation had taken a weird turn and it was entirely Rey's fault, and yet despite knowing that this was completely and utterly ridiculous and that this definitely wouldn't have happened if Mayrik had taken her in, she found she couldn't stop. The fact that she could have such a ridiculous conversation with her girlfriend and have it result in stifled giggling instead of outrage.

"I guess we're both weird. Another reason we work so well together," she said softly.

"Hey you leave me out of this. These are your weird fantasies, not mine," Aliana snorted, leaning forward and kissing Rey softly.

Rey hummed appreciatively into the kiss, wrapping her arms around Aliana's neck as she pressed flush against her. She pulled away just a hair and smiled. "I'm glad we can just talk openly between each other. No secrets, no judgement."

"Me too," Aliana nodded, her fingers running down Rey's back as she felt the ship rock in the Hyperspace tunnel. "It feels nice... to not have to hide anything."

"It does." Rey placed a tender kiss on Aliana's nose before nuzzling her cheek. "I love you, Aliana."

"I love you too," Aliana nodded, her fingers digging into Rey's back. She bit her lip as an unasked question hovered on the tip of her tongue. A question that popped up occasionally but always went unsaid for fear of making Rey feel pressured.

But, she had said no judgments...

"Rey... feel free to say no to this, but..." Aliana's hands drifted to her hips as she looked into the Jedi's eyes. "Could we..."

Rey's cheeks reddened as she understood what Aliana was asking her. "Oh! ...Um, well a part of me does want to," she admitted bashfully. "Just not yet. I... I think I know the reason, but it's kind of silly."

"What is it?" Aliana asked curiously. "Sweetie, your feelings aren't silly."

Rey brushed a lock of hair behind her ear as she steeled herself to continue. "I... I want to make sure our first time is special, you know? No interruptions, no stresses hanging over our head. Maybe a nice romantic dinner first." Her cheeks reddened further as she came closer to stammering. "I-I know I'm not 'giving away my innocence' or 'crossing a threshold' or anything. I just want to make sure it's memorable." She paused as she took a moment to think of an addendum. "And also make sure that Kylo Ren can't possibly feel anything through the bond. I do not need him intruding on us."

"I think that's sweet," Aliana smiled, kissing Rey's forehead. "You're so romantic, and I love that about you. And don't worry about him, I might not be able to block the bond anymore but I can keep him out for a few hours."

Rey giggled, leaning into Aliana's touch. "Thank you Alie. Everything about you is perfect. That's why I want to make sure our first time is perfect."

“That’s adorable,” Aliana smiled as she laid her forehead against Rey’s. “I’m sure it will be sweetie.”

“And really, after everything we’ve been through? It’s what we deserve,” Rey said, reaching up to stroke Aliana’s freckled cheek. “By the Force I love your freckles,” she cooed. It’s like you have a constellation on your face.”

Aliana blushed and looked away. “Really?”

“Really,” Rey insisted. “They’re like gifts from the stars themselves. They look lovely on you.”

“Rey that’s... thank you, that’s so sweet,” Aliana whispered. She laid her hand over Rey’s, relishing in how rough and hardened the Jedi’s hand felt. “I’ve never had someone comment on them before...”

“Well that’s a shame,” Rey pouted. “They’re so fetching. I know your eyes are probably what draw people in, but they’re not the only beautiful thing about you.”

Aliana smiled and pulled Rey’s hand over her heart. “...What... what else is there?”

Rey could feel Aliana’s heart beginning to hammer against her chest, prompting her to smile before she continued. “Well, your freckles as I mentioned. Your lips are also so soft and lovely. It makes me want to kiss you all the time. Your hair is so wild and free and you look immaculate when the wind blows. Your physique is to die for, your skin is flawless, and you’re super adorable when your face scrunches up in annoyance.”

Aliana scoffed and buried her face in Rey’s chest, making embarrassed mumbling sounds as her arms wrapped around the Jedi’s back. “REY!”

“What?” Rey asked with a laugh. “Am I wrong?”

“I guess not, but god, way to give a girl cardiac arrest!” Aliana lifted her head up and Rey could feel her heart pounding as their bodies came together.

“Don’t worry, sweetheart,” Rey cooed gently, relishing the sound of the Sith’s hammering pulse. “I’ll be here to resuscitate you.”

“I don’t want to have to be resuscitated again,” Aliana grumbled. “Once is enough.”

“Even if it’s me doing it?” Rey giggled.

“Depends, how are you reviving me?” Aliana snickered.

“Maybe with the Force... maybe with mouth to mouth... maybe with both,” Rey kissed Aliana gingerly, her grip tightening. “Would you like that? Me reviving you with a magic kiss?”

“Magic kiss? You’re so cliché,” Aliana laughed, leaning in and kissing the Jedi eagerly.

“I lived in the middle of nowhere most of my life. I’m entitled to be a little cliché,” Rey countered with faux indignance as she gently tugged on Aliana’s bottom lip with her teeth.

“Well you should know I like being shocked,” Aliana giggled as her nails brushed against Rey’s neck.

“Well, if you insist.”

Without warning, Rey let a single finger hover over Aliana’s shoulder, sending a small shock through the Force coursing between them. Aliana twitched slightly and her eyes drifted closed as she let out a pleased sigh. It was brief, but electrifying (badum tsh).

“Mmm... and I thought you wanted a romantic dinner first,” Aliana purred, opening half-lidded eyes as she looked up at Rey, her hands running over the Jedi’s shoulders.

Rey giggled. “You’re incorrigible, Alie,” she tutted. “Now hold me so that I may pretend that we’re the only two in the galaxy.” She settled back onto Aliana’s arms, her legs tangling with the Sith’s as they tried to be as close to one another as possible.

“Of course, Master Jedi,” Aliana cooed as she ran her fingers through Rey’s hair. For a moment, there was nothing. No politics, no fighting, no war. Just them and the gentle thrum of the Fury’s Hyperdrive as it soared back into Wild Space.

It was perfect.

The canisters collapsed in on themselves with a violent crunch when Kylo Ren closed his hand, and then hurled themselves at different targets with a flick of his wrist. A week of practice, of refined exercises and precision techniques and he was causing large amounts of destruction with very little actual power behind them. As he practiced, he fully understood why Amorosa had so frequently bested him despite being so weak in the Force. It had actually astounded him how much damage he could cause with just a few well placed pushes.

The entire training room he’d cobbled together in an empty cargo hold was a mess of twisted metal and transparisteel. Targets hastily constructed and then just as hastily demolished. He hadn’t so much as left the room in the last week, leaving the First Order’s operation to Hux while he continued to practice. He couldn’t afford any distractions. The training was meticulous and frustrating at times, but it was working. The more he devoted time to it, the more prepared he would be for the inevitable confrontation. One he had no intention of losing this time.

How ironic was it that the most valuable lesson he had ever learned came from no master. It wasn’t by Luke Skywalker’s hand that he became as strong as he was. Nor was it by Snoke’s. Instead, it was a single depraved, upstart Sith that taught him that the only person in the entire galaxy he could rely on was himself. The secret to his newfound abilities was within him all along. It came from no master, no weapon, not even the Dark Side itself. Just him and his own honed skill.

He would be sure to thank Amorosa for teaching him this valuable lesson. And he would thank her with humiliation and lethal force.

As he thought about Amorosa, he threw a crate even harder into the last standing target and smirked when it blasted apart under the force of the impact. His smirk fell when he heard his comlink buzz for the fiftieth time that day.

“WHAT?!” he snapped as he yanked it off his belt.

“If you’re done destroying the Cargo Hold, there’s been an incident regarding the escaped children,” came Hux’s irritated voice on the other end.

Kylo Ren did nothing to hide his sneer as he ended the call without another word. He walked out of the Cargo Hold, only schooling his expression when in the presence of others. The agitation he felt was nevertheless palpable. He knew that he had given clear instructions on what to do about the escapees. How Hux found the orders difficult to follow without fumbling, he could not possibly fathom. He would no doubt learn when he reached the bridge, though he was certainly not looking forward to it.

The journey to Hux was uneventful as he regarded the general with barely contained disdain. “What is the situation?” he asked curtly.

Hux waved to the rest of the crew and they quickly rushed out, not wanting to be around either of them when the bad news was given. Once the bridge was clear of absolutely everyone except him and Kylo Ren, Hux finally spoke.

“The Dreadnought we sent to tail the escapees was crippled,” Hux explained. “According to the captain, they were intercepted by the Sith’s corvette. The escapees are likely to be in the custody of the Resistance by now.”

Kylo Ren clenched his jaw, saying nothing for a moment. “Did the escapees take anything of value with them?” he asked finally.

“Plenty of child recruits, a small pack of high energy weapons and several datapads containing sensitive information,” Hux said, glaring out the front window. “Including the locations of several training facilities.”

“Have those facilities fortified,” Kylo said sternly. “Search for any dissent among the trainees. If you find any, stamp it out. Remind them of the First Order’s strength. We can’t have the Sith’s influence seep into our ranks.”

“I fear it may already have,” Hux said as he refused to look at Ren, “Reports from Captain Phasma indicate the Sith is revered among the children who escaped. They were unable to quell that sentiment before the escape. If it’s spread to them, it’s already spread everywhere else. Somehow our humiliation at Crait has become common knowledge.”

Kylo Ren fought to keep his growing anger in check. It would do no good to unleash it on the equipment that surrounded them, much less on Hux. “It seems we need to remind the galaxy of our power,” Kylo Ren said. “A show of might that will instill fear into their hearts. Something that will poison the hope they cling to.”

“That will be difficult,” Hux frowned. “Such a show of force was what Starkiller Base was for. We spent years perfecting that weapon.”

“And it was undone by one woman with no remarkable strength in the Force,” Ren snapped. “I’m not talking about a big weapon...”

He turned around and racked his brain. Destroying an entire star system was a show of force, but the very idea of doing it only galvanized the Resistance to fight harder than ever before. Something more delicate would need to be done. He thought for a moment as he considered everything he’d studied of history in the last few months. Then it struck him like a bolt of lightning. A tactic from several thousand years ago that had successfully turned the tide of end of war negotiations in the Empire’s favor. But he needed more than just a single blitz attack.

He finally turned around. “Gather as many dreadnoughts as you can and send all the records of Emperor Palpatine to my quarters. I’m going to bring an old ghost back from the dead to terrorize the galaxy again.”

Hux arched a brow, nearly asking Kylo Ren for clarification, but ultimately deciding against it. “...At once, Supreme Leader,” he said civilly.

Kylo Ren turned back around and quickly left the bridge as his plan continued to formulate in his mind. If he played his cards right he could destroy the Resistance without so much as touching their base.

And humiliate the Sith completely and utterly.

Aliana let out a calming breath as she felt herself drift into her trance. She rarely got to meditate anymore, and she was in desperate need of it. After such a long time spent either in a coma, training, sleeping, and running a fleet, slipping back into a trance felt like the most relaxing experience in the world. All her troubles melted away and there was nothing but the thrum of the Force.

Then the voice cut through her thoughts and nearly made her jump out of her skin.

“Aliana?”

Aliana screamed as her eyes snapped open, the sound of a man’s voice way too close to her ear for comfort. As she whirled around and swung at whoever it was, her fist connected with nothing. Only passing through a translucent figure. She looked up as she shifted away from it and suddenly recognized the face from old Republic holorecordings.

“...Lord Vader?!” she balked, looking at the Force Ghost standing in her room.

The man let out a small huff of humorless laughter. “...If you prefer, then yes,” he said. “I suppose I can’t divorce myself from that name, as much as I’d like to.”

“The hell do you want?! And it’s Amorosa, by the way!” Aliana said, putting a hand on her chest as she tried to steady her breathing.

“Well at least one of us is proud of our Sith titles,” Vader bemused. “I felt your recent exploits echo through the Force. Whispers of a truly benevolent Sith. I simply wanted to see for myself if it were true.”

Aliana rolled her eyes. “So you scared the living daylights out of me for the sake of curiosity? What is it with you Skywalkers and sneaking up on me?”

“It was not my intention to surprise you,” he said. “I had assumed that your meditation would have helped you sense my approach more easily. Of course, it’s been awhile since I’ve truly had the ability to sneak up on anyone.” Another humorless laugh came from the ghost.

“Uh-huh...” Aliana’s eyes narrowed as she stood up, brushing herself off. “Well, here I am. The benevolent Dark Lady. Is that it, or did you want to pick my brain or something?”

Vader rested his chin against his forefinger and thumb as he regarded Aliana carefully, his eyes narrowing slightly as he did. "Not entirely what I expected," he pondered aloud. "Though something about you feels... familiar. Your blood perhaps?"

"You killed my grandmother," Aliana said with a deadpan look on her face. "Darth Alora."

A beat of silence passed between the two of them. "...Ah," he said plainly. "Can't say I'm surprised. You'd have an easier time finding someone I haven't wronged at some point in time. My daughter can attest to that."

"Well your kids aren't much better," Aliana huffed. "Your son tried to kill me when I was a kid, and your daughter's been hounding me for corrupting the last of the Jedi."

Vader pursed his lips into a thin line. "I'm aware of my son's actions. He confided in me when he joined the force. Though Leia's actions surprise me. Disregarding her clear hatred of me, she was never as attuned with the Light as Luke was. Passion ran too hot in her veins."

"Having seen the crap your son pulled, I don't think the Light has anything to do with it," Aliana scoffed. "Leia's in denial. She blames the Dark Side for her son's corruption and still can't admit to herself that it's not to blame. So she takes her anger out on me. She's backed off, but she still hates me."

"And what of this Jedi you've 'corrupted'?" Vader inquired. "Her power echoes greatly in the Force. What's her story?"

"Her parents sold her into slavery and she was left on Jakku until the First Order attacked," Aliana explained. "Far as I can tell her power comes from the Force deciding it's up to her to redeem your grandson."

Vader frowned. "Kylo Ren," he said quietly. "One of the greatest manifestations of my sins. I've tried to reach out to him, but he has shut me out. Concealing himself in darkness. For years he sought the trail of death and torment I left behind as a voice to guide him, deafening himself to the pleas of myself and others. I suppose it would make sense that the Force seemed desperate enough to try something like this."

"Frankly the Force shouldn't be calling on random women to redeem one Jedi," Aliana rolled her eyes. "It's not our responsibility to save Kylo Ren from his own bad decisions."

"On that we can agree," Vader nodded.

"I've seen the depths of the Force's machinations," Aliana frowned. "I've seen what it wants from this little game it's playing. And I've seen that the Force is not happy that Rey chose me instead."

"And how do you intend to handle that?" Vader asked curiously. "If there is any wisdom I have to give, it's that the hands of fate are not so easily denied. If the Force demands that Rey redeems Kylo Ren, how do you intend to stop it?"

"I'm going to kill him," Aliana said, with a conviction that momentarily unbalanced Vader. "I'm going to rip this dyad apart, free Rey's soul from his foul presence, and then end his miserable life!"

Vader's look of surprise did not leave his face even as he spoke again. "Well you certainly are Sith," he said. "And I sense you care greatly for Rey, don't you?"

"I love her," Aliana said, her face softening slightly. "I'll do anything to ensure she doesn't suffer any more than she already has."

Something akin to a gentle smile grew on Vader's face. A sight that no other living soul could ever claim to have seen. "I certainly know that feeling," he said warmly. "I have no doubt that you love this girl and will do whatever you can to keep her safe... and I hope you have greater luck accomplishing that than I have."

"Well, it's hard to be manipulated by the Dark Lady of the Sith when you ARE the Dark Lady of the Sith," Aliana smirked.

"This is true," Vader laughed before giving Aliana another look. "As I said, you're not quite what I expected... not sure if that's good or bad, yet. I suppose that only time will tell."

"Hmm," Aliana said, unfolding her arms and heading for the door. "You can go now. And don't come back. You hurt my mother, and your son hurt me. I don't want to see either of you ever again if I can help it."

"I can abide by that," Vader nodded. "And I wish you a future brighter than your past, Darth Amorosa. May the Force serve you well." With that, the spectral image of Darth Vader dissipated.

Aliana looked at the spot where Vader vanished in quiet contemplation. "I wish it would," she said before turning and leaving her quarters.

The Most Important Question

Aliana was the first off the Fury as she waved to one of her own officers. The increased presence in the canyon made the Resistance Base practically bustling, almost as if it were a real spaceport rather than some hideaway in the middle of nowhere. “Bring me General Leia and a medical team. We’ve got children aboard and some of them are injured.”

“Yes, my lord,” the officer said, giving Aliana a dutiful nod before rushing to complete his orders.

Aliana turned back to the Fury to see Rey and Jannah heading down the docking ramp. “The kids are all awake,” Rey said, a smile on her face. “And they’re excited to see the base. I heard one of them say ‘Kriff, yeah!’ before covering their mouth.”

“Hey I’m not gonna stop them,” Aliana snickered as she took Rey’s hand and intertwined their fingers and looked at Jannah. “Leia should be here soon along with some medics. I don’t suppose you can tell us about their other training facilities?”

“Well, we did leave in something of a rush, but...” Janna fumbled through a pouch on her belt before extracting a data crystal and handing it to Aliana. “I did download a star chart with training facilities marked. I can’t guarantee it’s still good intel, though. Those charts are updated regularly. Either those facilities could be relocated or fortified.”

“It’s better than nothing. It gives us something to investigate,” Aliana nodded, taking the data crystal and beckoning them to follow.

She led Jannah through the canyon, with Jannah marvelling at the construction and drilling going on. Large divets were being made in the canyon walls to fit freighters, collections of starfighters, and all manner of storage holds. Haulers and tractors were dragging resources up and down the canyon and the entire place had the air of a small city built into the cliffside. “This is your base?”

Rey nodded. “It’s been under construction for three months. We’re hoping to have it completed by year’s end.”

“This is... incredible!” Jannah exclaimed, her eyes never staying in one place for more than a second before finding something else to marvel over. “And all of these people! How did you organize a force this large!?”

“Well, when you and your family spend their lives doing work for folk in the outer rim, you earn a favor or two,” Aliana said casually.

“You did this?” Jannah asked, raising an eyebrow.

“That fleet overhead is the Sith Fleet,” Aliana explained. “Called in some favors, said I was aiding the Resistance. You can rally a lot of people when you have their confidence. Still waiting on supplies from the Republic. Leia doesn’t like relying on me.”

“She doesn’t like Sith,” Rey explained further. “Sore spot for her.”

“Well, Jedi or Sith, anything is better than the First Order,” Jannah said.

“I like this one,” Aliana smiled at Rey.

“Should I be worried?” Rey jested, planting a kiss on Aliana’s cheek.

“No,” Aliana cooed, pulling Rey flush against her and giving her a chaste kiss.

“Oh wow,” Jannah said, stifling a giggle. “It’s really just all day with you two isn’t it?”

“Galaxy is at war,” Rey said, not taking her eyes off of Aliana. “Got to enjoy what comforts we have.”

“It pisses Leia off to no end,” Aliana giggled, laying a hand on Rey’s cheek and smiling at her.

As if on cue, Leia approached the three of them, a medical crew following in her wake. Whatever her expression was before, it quickly turned into restrained exasperation at the sight of Rey and Aliana fawning over each other.

“Hey there, General,” Aliana greeted with a grin. “Your ears burning?”

“You said you had children aboard in need of medical care?” Leia asked, her brow furrowed slightly.

“Yeah, on the Fury,” Aliana jerked her thumb to the ship. “There’s a few with fractured limbs, a few scraps and cuts, and one girl took a taze bolt to the stomach.”

Leia winced, her earlier annoyance forgotten in the face of maternal centered sympathy. “Take care of them,” Leia said, turning to the medical staff. “But be careful in your approach. They likely won’t react well to strangers.”

The medics nodded in understanding, moving to enter the Fury but stopping just shy. One of them turned to look at Aliana, a somewhat nervous expression on her face.

“Permission to board the Fury, Lord Amorosa?”

“Yeah sure, go ahead,” Aliana waved them down as she kept her eyes on Rey. “Go get the kids.”

The medics nodded and briskly walked up the docking ramp.

Leia turned to look at Jannah, a warmer expression growing on her aged features. “So I take it you’re one of the troopers who defected?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Jannah said, instinctively saluting. “Former trooper Jannah! Here to help fight against the First Order however I can!”

“Well first you can tell us everything you know. About the First Order and their movements and any of their other holding facilities where they keep their kidnapped children,” Leia pressed.

“I gave the intel of the holding facilities to Aliana,” Jannah said, gesturing to Aliana who was still lost in Rey’s eyes. “Anything else I can give, I will gladly do so.”

“Ah,” Leia’s expression soured slightly, but she nonetheless guided Jannah toward the war room. “C’mon then.”

As Jannah was led away, she glanced back at Rey and Aliana and then back to Leia. "Pardon me, General, but do you have a problem with those two?"

Leia was quiet for a beat before shaking her head. "It's not important," she said. "At least, nothing for you to worry about."

"Are you sure? Because I've watched leadership infighting before," Jannah said as she entered the war room. "It can be devastating to an army's effectiveness."

"Again, you let me worry about that," Leia said, more firmly this time. "I understand you're here to help, dear, but you did only just arrive. Don't try to bear every problem of the Resistance on your shoulders on the first day. We have plenty of work to go around so you will want to pace yourself."

"Alright... if you say so..." Jannah cast a glance back to the door to see Aliana and Rey following behind them, Rey with a very red face and Aliana looked extremely smug.

They gathered around the holoterminal in the war room, Leia standing on one end with Holdo and Aliana standing on the exact opposite side with Rey. Jannah watched as Rose, Finn and Poe stood alongside the two while other Resistance officers stood with Leia. Jannah winced as she noticed the stark divide. Even if Leia wouldn't admit it, there was a schism forming in the Resistance that was begging to split open.

"Alright. First issue on the docket," Leia stated, calling the meeting to session. "Thanks to Rey and Lord Amorosa's work, we have secured the liberation of one of the First Order's holding facilities. One of the rebel troopers, Jannah, has offered intel on the First Order's inner workings." She gestured to Jannah, silently encouraging the younger woman to step forward.

"Thank you, General," Jannah said stepping forward. "On our way out, I was able to secure a star chart with all the known holding facilities marked on it. This information grows more dated by the hour so it's best to act as soon as possible." Jannah turned to look at Aliana and Rey, who listened to her with rapt attention. "I also discovered, thanks to Aliana's insight, that there are those among the First Order's ranks who are... Force aware?"

"Force sensitive," Aliana corrected.

"Right, Force sensitive, and the First Order seemingly doesn't realize this. There's no telling how many others in the training facility share this gift."

"If the First Order does become aware, those kids' lives are going to become a lot worse," Aliana's brow furrowed as she glanced at Finn. "How heavily guarded are those facilities usually?"

"Mostly a token task force," Finn explained. "Their secrecy is their usual protection. They're so far out of the way that the bulk of the First Order would be unable to reach them if they were attacked."

Aliana pulled the data crystal out of her pocket and set it into the holoterminal. Immediately the coordinates on the map lit up with systems that housed training facilities.

"Oh my god," Aliana's eyes widened as she ran her finger through the map. "About a... sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen... third of these are within a few hours of Odessen!"

“They must have built these facilities on the fringes of Wild Space to keep them from being disturbed,” Holdo said, her eyes fixed on the map.

“We could hit all of them within a few days,” Aliana nodded as she started doing the calculations in her head. “A few corvettes, one cruiser and some transport ships and the First Order will have significantly fewer kids to exploit.”

“The sooner, the better,” Jannah said. “Like I said, I can’t imagine those facilities are going to have just token task forces for very long. Not after all this.”

“Then we’d better move quickly,” Aliana turned to Talon and handed her the data crystal. “Take a small strike force and hit as many of those facilities as you can. I want all of those kids safely in our hands and I want every one of those facilities obliterated.”

“And if the First Order sends reinforcements?” Talon asked.

“Show them no mercy, for they will show you none in return,” Aliana nodded.

“Yes, my Lord,” Talon nodded, an almost malevolent grin spreading on her lips as she made her way out of the war room.

“She seems... enthused,” Jannah said with an air of surprise. “I could practically feel the bloodlust rolling off of her.”

“She loves her job,” Aliana replied with a shrug.

“Is she an Admiral?” Jannah asked.

“She’s Sith,” Aliana corrected.

“Huh, I guess I should have realized that,” Jannah said with a huff of laughter. “How many more of you are there?”

“Well those under my command are called the Sith Fleet, but in terms of Sith Lords, so far it’s just me and Talon,” Aliana explained. “Though there might be a third, you never know what could happen.” As she said this, she wrapped an arm around Rey’s waist and smirked at the Jedi.

“Well the Sith teachings are becoming more and more alluring, I can’t deny,” Rey replied, giving Aliana a playful smirk in kind.

Jannah looked around the room, gauging the reactions of all those who watched the Jedi and Sith so unabashedly flirting. Most people simply watched with amusement. Others seemed rather indifferent to the whole display. Leia on the other hand looked rather exasperated, or at least trying to conceal that she looked exasperated. It was clear that the sight seemed to irritate her in some way, but the former trooper couldn’t quite understand why. Was it because they’re both women? She understood that the First Order despised such a union, but the General of the Resistance? Something about that didn’t add up.

‘She doesn’t like Sith,’ Jannah recalled Rey saying. That had to be the answer. But Aliana was doing a great deal of work helping the fight against the First Order. Had that not changed her opinion at all?

“Alright, you all have your assignments. Back to work,” Leia sighed, waving her hand to dismiss everyone. “Rose, Paige, take a corvette and accompany Lord Talon.”

“Yes, General,” Rose nodded as she and her sister retreated from the War Room.

Leia turned to Jannah again and gestured to the map. “What do you think of all of this?”

“The facilities?” Jannah asked. “Well... I certainly don’t like them. Being stationed at them for most of my service has familiarized me with the First Order’s methods. Squashing the concept of hope early on in their recruit- their captives minds. Trying to discipline them through fear. Programming methods that are essentially torture. They’re inhumane places that turn children into weapons. The less of them there are the better.”

“So how did you and your friends break free from that conditioning?” Leia asked. “What made you emulate Finn here and make the choice to leave?”

Jannah thought the question over, resting her chin against her hand as she did. “Aliana says it could be the Force. For the longest time, there was this voice in my head that was telling me that all of this was wrong. It broke through the programming, it overruled the conditioning. It was like this gut instinct that I couldn’t squash down even if I wanted to.”

Leia nodded. “Finn said something similar, but that it was eating at him for a long time. Finn is indeed Force Sensitive. Perhaps you might be as well.”

Jannah glanced back to Finn, who was talking to Aliana about something far enough away that she couldn’t hear and looking rather serious. Aliana, for her part, was nodding. “Really?”

“It wouldn’t surprise me,” Leia said with a fond smile. “Thankfully, we have resources to help you realize your potential.”

“You mean becoming a Sith? Like Aliana?” Jannah asked.

Leia’s expression became noticeably strained. “...I think we have more than enough Sith in our ranks as it is. We have to consider the balance of Light and Dark after all.”

Jannah’s eyes narrowed slightly. “You don’t like the Sith, do you?”

Leia’s face fell completely at that. “I spent my formative years fighting against an Empire ruled by two Sith, one of them I had the misfortune of being related to, which all but destroyed my reputation and prompting the Republic at large to forget all I did to bring it back. So I can’t say I’m very fond of the Sith.”

“Hmm...” Jannah said, pursing her lips slightly. “Thank you, General.”

As everyone filed out of the War Room, Finn laid a hand on Aliana’s shoulder and leaned in toward her ear. “Can I talk to you for a minute?”

Aliana glanced at him and smiled. “Of course, I’ve always got time for you.” She followed him further away from the holoterminal and just outside the door into the canyon. “What’s up?”

Finn took a deep breath and looked Aliana in the eye. “I don’t want to be a Jedi or a Sith.”

Aliana looked at Finn with curiosity. “Oh? So are you saying you just don’t want to continue training, or are you saying you want to find another path to take?”

“I’ve been thinking about it for a while, and I just don’t think the whole magic swordsman thing is for me,” Finn shook his head. “I only really started doing this because I thought I had to, but the further I got into it the more uncomfortable I felt. Hearing Leia lose her mind over which side I’d take certainly wasn’t helping, and... my rifle feels more comfortable in my hands than a lightsaber, you know?”

“I can understand that,” Aliana said. “The Jedi put too much reverence in the idea of lightsabers anyway. It’s really just a tool unlike any other. Someone isn’t less civilized for using a blaster.”

“Yeah. I was target shooting the other day and it really all came to me when I realized I could use the Force to improve my accuracy,” Finn nodded. “That felt... right. It felt like it suited me.”

“Interesting,” Aliana put a finger to her lips. “I’d never considered that before...”

“I tried using two blaster pistols at once and... I could,” Finn added. “Like I didn’t even need to look at the targets to hit them, I could just rely on the Force to help me with my aim. Like can you imagine?”

“That’s actually pretty ingenious,” Aliana said as she started mulling over the idea Finn had put in her head. “Okay, how about this? I know a number of techniques for meditation and focus, things that would be really useful to a squad. How about we focus your training on those things from here on out, and you could train other like-minded Force Sensitives the same way?”

“I can do that,” Finn nodded. “I think I’ll have better luck training ground forces though. Poe’s the fly boy after all.”

“Now that I think about it, I use the Force to pilot my ship in battle and can manage pretty well,” Aliana chuckled. “Imagine how that could benefit someone who actually knows how to fly the damn thing?”

“Maybe that’s why Poe isn’t Force sensitive,” Finn chuckled. “He would be too powerful.”

“Oh he’d have us all bent over a rail by the end of the week,” Aliana laughed, clapping a hand on Finn’s shoulder.

Finn blinked. “Well that was... graphic,” he said, a flush of heat filling his cheeks. “You have a colorful imagination don’t you?”

“Yes I do,” Aliana nodded, pulling at her robe. “Ironical considering I never wear anything brighter than a medium grey.”

“You should try a bold red,” Finn said. “It would go with your eyes.”

“Don’t let Rey hear you say that,” Aliana laughed. “She’s been hyper-protective since I woke up.”

“Hey, Lady. I’m spoken for too,” Finn said almost indignantly. “Besides, I would think Rey would be protective against people trying to stab you. Not people kinda but not really putting the moves on you.”

Aliana snorted and nodded as she wrapped an arm around Finn's shoulder in a one-armed hug. "Bold of you to assume she isn't protective against both and with admirable gusto."

"Has it really been that bad?" Finn asked in surprise. "I know she was miserable those months you were out, but I thought she'd get better once you started walking around again."

"Oh yeah, things are better. But that battle really kriffed with her head," Aliana nodded. "If I so much as nick my finger on a vegetable knife she's fussing over me. It's not a problem, like she's not smothering me. She's just really anxious about anything that might hurt me again. I'm more just concerned about the stress getting to her."

Finn made a small 'ah' in understanding and nodded. "Speaking of, how are you feeling? Wounds acting up at all? Your leg not bothering you?"

"The leg is perfect. Rey was an absolute angel making this. It's so comfortable and it's like I never lost the original," Aliana smiled. "My midsection is a different story. 2V did some scans and I've got scar tissue in my muscles, so it hurts a little to move in certain directions. It also just flares up in general, and he's got me on pain injections for it. I'm gonna have chronic pain for the rest of my life."

"Ow," Finn winced sympathetically. "Sorry to hear about that. Bet you're looking forward to giving Kylo Ren some payback for that, huh?"

"Yeah," Aliana nodded. "I may have let him stab me but I'm still gonna kick his face in as if I didn't."

"I still owe him for the scars he gave me," Finn said, feeling the wound on his back itch slightly. "Man, who doesn't want a piece of the grease stain these days?"

"I'll be sure to let you get a few kicks to the crotch in before I cut his head off," Aliana chuckled. "How're things with Poe anyway? You two still on that honeymoon period?"

"Oh his pride and ego definitely aren't lost on me these days," Finn said with a huff of laughter. "But he's been great. A real sweetheart when he thinks no one else is looking. Really good kisser too. I mean... I haven't really kissed anyone else, but I can still tell he's good at it."

"Oooh, good for you," Aliana smirked, hipchecking him as they walked down the canyon. "Been in the First Order too long, gotta make up for lost time with a trigger happy flyboy?"

"'Trigger happy' is a way to put it," Finn snickered. "I swear, I barely have to touch him to get him going."

"Lucky bastard," Aliana scoffed. "Rey wants to do this whole romantic event out of it. It's sweet but... good lord if I have to look at those muscles for much longer I might just pounce."

Finn furrowed his brow slightly in confusion before his eyes widened with incredulous clarity. "What... you two still haven't!? Wow. I am genuinely shocked. I thought you two would have been going at it like ewoks by now."

"No. Rey's been anxious about it, which is understandable. But now she says she wants it to be special. Make a whole night out of it," Aliana shook her head. "I get it, and I'm happy to wait for whatever she's got planned but... by the Force that woman's gorgeous!"

Finn chuckled. "And Leia says that Sith have no discipline."

"Leia's an old schutta who knows nothing about the Sith and is begging for a lightsaber in the face," Aliana scoffed.

"Excuse me?" came Leia's voice behind her.

Aliana whirled around and stared at Leia nervously. "Uh... I..." then her nervous expression faded and she just scoffed. "Wait, why am I nervous? I could take you."

"It's that mom energy," Finn explained with a smile. "Makes everyone nervous reflexively."

"Must you encourage her?" Leia exasperated.

"Sorry, General," Finn winced slightly before relaxing and turning to Aliana. "See?"

"That is not Mom energy," Aliana scoffed. "My mother could raise an eyebrow and your life would flash before your eyes."

"Huh, maybe that's why Luke killed her," Leia deadpanned.

All at once, all the energy between them was sucked out of the air as if it had been vented into space. Finn looked at Leia wide-eyed and took a tentative step back from her. "General..."

Aliana looked at Leia with a mixture of shock and genuine pain. She was lost for words, trying to process how Leia could have just off-handedly said something like that about her mother. She'd always known the General to be antagonistic, but she thought this kind of cruelty was behind her.

Leia seemed to realize that she'd overstepped and glanced away from Aliana. "Amorosa, I'm-"

She didn't get to finish her sentence as Aliana's look of shock quickly turned into a glare and she extended a hand. A torrent of lightning shot from her fingertips and collided with Leia, sending the General to the floor.

Finn flinched back, if only because the suddenness of the lighting caused him to jump. Before his initial shock had time to transform into anything else, the lightning ceased, leaving Leia crumpled on the floor, smoking and cursing quietly. He turned to look at Aliana who appeared more furious than he had ever seen her before. Her blood red eyes even appeared to be glowing.

"...Uh, Alie?" He asked, trying to get her attention.

"I warned you," Aliana said aloud, her lethal gaze still fixed on the older woman, who still laid on the ground. "One more problem and I leave. You had your chance."

"Alie, c'mon. Just settle--"

"DON'T TELL ME TO SETTLE DOWN!" Aliana turned a glare to Finn. "If you think I should take that garbage from her, you're sorely mistaken! She needs me a hell of a lot more than I need her!"

She turned on her heel and stormed back toward the Fury, her blood practically boiling and the Force rippling around her like a literal storm of anger. Resistance fighters scrambled to get out of her way, some even whispering to each other asking what was wrong. Aliana ran up the ramp of the

Fury and slammed the door shut behind her with the Force, storming onto the main deck where Rey sat tinkering with her lightsaber.

“I’m leaving!” she spat as she walked past her and to the cockpit. “Are you staying or are you coming?”

Rey looked up at Aliana and watched her as she stormed right on past. She was silent for a moment, utterly befuddled by the way her lover was practically burning with rage. Eventually, she rose to her feet and rushed into the cockpit after her.

“Okay, take it back a few clicks for me?” she asked, looking at Aliana in concern. “Why are you leaving? What happened?”

“Leia made a crack about my mother,” Aliana said, flicking some switches on the control panel. “I told her that if there was one more problem I was taking the fleet and leaving, so now I am.”

“Woah, woah, woah,” Rey said, flipping the switches back. “Hang on. What did she say?”

“I made a point to Finn that my mother could raise an eyebrow at you and you’d wilt,” Aliana said, sitting back in her chair as tears started to brim in her eyes. “And then Leia made a crack about that being the reason Luke killed her.”

Rey’s eyes widened in shock. Her hand covered her mouth as that horrific description played in her mind. She watched as Aliana began to break down in front of her. “...Oh, Alie,” she said softly, kneeling beside the chair and taking the Sith’s hand in her own.

Aliana squeezed tightly to Rey’s hand and tried to fight back the tears that were threatening to fall. “I’ve had it. I’m done dealing with this horrible schutta! You said she’d cooled off about me, but she’s just been at it again since I woke up!”

“I...” Rey winced. “I honestly thought she was getting better. I... I was wrong, Alie. I’m sorry.”

Aliana turned her chair and wrapped her arms around Rey’s shoulders, clinging to the Jedi and crying softly. “Why does she hate me so much?”

“I don’t know,” Rey said, stroking Aliana’s hair comfortingly. “Whatever reasons she has are unfounded. You’re wonderful.”

Aliana whimpered and slipped off her chair and down to the floor, holding tightly to Rey and burying her face in her neck. “Will you come with me?”

“I will go anywhere with you, Alie,” Rey said, placing a soft kiss on the other woman’s head. “Whatever path you take, I’ll be with you.”

Aliana pulled back and looked at Rey with a hopeful smile. She ran a hand over the Jedi’s cheek as she felt her entire body unclench. There was a thought in the very back of her mind that Rey might not come with her. That she’d choose the Resistance over her if Aliana decided she needed to leave. That thought now laid quiet and she relaxed considerably.

“Thank you,” she whispered.

“You don’t need to thank me,” Rey said, shaking her head. “It’s you and me until the end. Nothing is going to change that.” She leaned forward slightly to rest her forehead against Aliana’s, taking

this moment to just be closer to her. To give her the comfort she needed and deserved. To just be with this wonderful, beautiful, utterly impossible woman.

“When can we leave?” Aliana asked, kissing Rey’s cheek.

“Now hold on. I do want a chance to see if I can make this right,” Rey said, placing a hand on Aliana’s back and pulling her closer. “I want to see if there’s anything that can be done to salvage this. But if you’re not happy with it, then we leave. Okay?”

Aliana made a noise in protest. In any other context, Rey might describe it as a whine. Not this time. She wouldn’t be so condescending. Not about this.

“Rey, I warned Leia and she didn’t listen,” Aliana protested. “She’s not getting any better.”

“I know, I’m not going to talk to her,” Rey said, running her fingers through Aliana’s hair. “I’m going to talk to Holdo and the rest of High Command. I’m sure they can do something about her once and for all. Just let me try? Please?”

Aliana grimaced. Everything was screaming at her to just leave. Alas, Rey knew how to be very convincing when she held her like this. When she spoke with such reassurance so gently. “...I hate how hard you make it to say no,” Aliana mused, resting her head against Rey’s shoulder with a soft thud.

“It’ll be alright. You get final say. If you’re not happy with what High Command does, then we leave. No questions asked,” Rey said, stroking her hair as she rubbed the Sith’s back in small circles. “Deal?”

Aliana lifted her head enough to look at Rey and give her a small nod. “Deal.”

“Thank you, Alie,” Rey smiled. “I knew you wouldn’t deprive me of the chance to yell at people on your behalf.”

Aliana managed a small chuckle, much to Rey’s delight.

“There it is,” Rey cooed. “There’s that laugh I love so much.”

High Command had gathered at Rey’s request, but most of them looked confused. Leia had been specifically requested to not be present, and that left only Holdo, Ackbar and Rose at the holoterminal. Poe had been asked to stand in for Leia as the next highest ranking officer in the military. Not even he knew what this was about, but his gut feeling told him it was about Aliana electrocuting Leia.

Rey came in with Aliana behind her and the two stood beside each other as they faced the rest of High Command. “Thank you, everyone. I understand I sprung all this on you at the last second, but Leia’s behavior toward Aliana has only continued despite reassurances that it would stop.”

“We heard from Finn there was an incident,” Rose said with a frown. “I take it whatever Leia said was especially bad?”

“Leia made a crack about Mayrik’s murder,” Rey said bluntly.

There was a collective wince among the High Command. Poe was heard sucking air through his clenched teeth.

“And that’s when things turned violent?” Amilyn asked.

“I shocked her and left,” Aliana said, folding her arms and looking displeased.

“The fact is that Leia has had multiple chances to improve her behavior to Aliana and so far she has taken none of those opportunities,” Rey said, her voice firm and leaving no room to argue. “It’s disrespectful, unprofessional and it will not be tolerated anymore. We demand that she be reprimanded immediately.”

“I’m sensing an ‘or else’ in there somewhere,” Poe said.

“We are fully prepared to withdraw the Sith Fleet from Odessen and from the Resistance if these needs are not met,” Rey nodded.

“So that’s it?” Ackbar asked, his guttural tone harboring a hint of displeasure. “You’ll forsake the entire Resistance for the actions, nay, the words of one woman?”

“One woman who holds disproportionate power and uses it to target a specific member of the Resistance, Ackbar,” Poe said, frowning at the Admiral. “Leia leads the Resistance. If her actions make Aliana feel unsafe or unwelcome, that’s all of our responsibility!”

“What would you have us do, Amorosa?” Ackbar asked. “Strip her of her rank? Try her for treason? All for an off color remark? We are at war over the fate of the galaxy and you’re extorting us over hurt feelings!”

“Ackbar, this has been a problem for a long time,” Amilyn said firmly. “We can’t afford to ignore it anymore.”

“You want to lecture someone about the fate of the galaxy, lecture Leia,” Rey said, glaring at Ackbar. “She’s the one being so petulant to one woman simply for the color of her lightsaber and putting the entire Resistance at risk by alienating her. Like it or not, Alie’s been a valuable asset to the Resistance. And if she goes, so do I.”

“What about the children?” Amilyn asked. “Will you take them with you as well?”

Aliana shrugged. “Haven’t thought about it.”

“Amilyn please don’t distract from the issue,” Rey pinched the bridge of her nose. “Is anything going to be done about Leia?”

There was a silence around High Command as everyone looked at each other. Then, Poe perked up and gestured Rose over to whisper in her ear. Rose’s eyes widened as she nodded and gestured for him to continue.

“Currently, Leia holds power over the rest of High Command. A sort of Chancellor vs Senate relationship,” Poe explained. “With unanimous support, we could bring her back down to our level. She’d have less power to wield and would have to actually answer to High Command when something goes wrong. It would also mean that a vote for actions taken against her wouldn’t need

unanimous support,” he punctuated this by scowling at Ackbar. “With Rose and Amilyn both being sympathetic, it’d be considerably easier to reign Leia in if she steps out of line.”

Rey blinked, not expecting such an idea to come from Poe of all people. “That is... surprisingly politically minded of you, Captain Dameron,” she said with a hint of a smirk.

“Slander,” Poe quipped back. “The point is Leia would no longer have the wiggle room to be as disrespectful to Alie as she has.”

Rey glanced toward Aliana and laid a hand on her shoulder. “Does that sound acceptable?”

Aliana looked around the room as she mulled it over. Having Leia defanged and held accountable for her actions sounded like a benefit. Knowing that Amilyn and Rose were in her corner as well was also a comfort. She looked up at Poe and nodded. “Yeah, that’s acceptable. Assuming it can actually be done,” she punctuated this with a narrowed glance at Ackbar.

“This hardly seems necessary,” Ackbar muttered.

“It’s either this, or lose the support of the Sith fleet,” Amilyn chided. “It cost next to nothing for us and we keep their aid.”

“Like it or not, Ackbar, Aliana’s loyalty isn’t to the Resistance. And frankly I can’t blame her, because the General’s been nothing but hostile to her since she arrived,” Poe added. “Either we reign Leia in, or we lose a valuable asset. You can argue that Alie should just get over it until you’re blue in the face, but she won’t. And frankly I don’t think she should.”

Ackbar looked off to the side and grumbled some more before finally speaking up. “Very well.”

“Well then,” Rose said with a satisfied smile. “That’s a unanimous vote to relieve Leia of her authority not reserved for any one member of High Command. Should she exhibit hostile or otherwise inappropriate behavior again, a majority decision will reprimand her further.”

“Should we not also address Amorosa’s attack on General Leia?” Ackbar asked, though more in inquiry than hostility.

“Leia’s injuries are superficial. If Alie wanted to hurt her, she would have,” Poe said dismissively. “She was provoked and responded in kind, and restrained herself to a warning shot.”

Ackbar didn’t seem entirely pleased with the dismissal but said no more about it.

“We will be sure to inform the General of this in the next High Command gathering,” Amilyn said, looking at Aliana and Rey. “Are these actions to your satisfaction?”

Rey looked at Aliana expectantly, who nodded. “Yes, they are... thank you,” she said with a small smile. “I won’t withdraw the fleet.”

“You have our gratitude, Lord Amorosa,” Amilyn smiled with a slight bow. “It would be unfortunate to lose your support at this time.”

Aliana nodded and tugged on Rey’s arm, signalling that she’d like to return to the ship. Rey excused herself and followed. As they walked down the canyon, Aliana took Rey’s hand and squeezed it tightly. “Thanks,” she whispered.

“Thank you for giving me the chance to set things right,” Rey smiled, squeezing Aliana’s hand in kind. “I know that couldn’t have been comfortable for you.”

“You’re right, it wasn’t,” Aliana nodded as she pulled Rey closer and kissed her cheek. “But having you there helps.”

“You’ll always have me here,” Rey said, enveloping the Sith in a hug. “And I’ll always have your back.” She buried her face in Aliana’s hair, relishing in the sweet, spicy smell as her arms tightened slightly around her. Not too tightly, though. She knew Aliana’s wounds acted up if she gripped her too hard.

“I know you will,” Aliana whispered, resting her head on Rey’s shoulder and quietly thanking the Force that Rey was so much taller than her. “I love you so much. Ever since I woke up you’ve been so lovely. A little overprotective, but I kinda like that.”

The two pulled apart to return to the Fury, and sat in the lounge. Aliana moved to snuggle up to Rey, when she put a hand on her chest to stop her.

“Alie, how long have we been together?” Rey asked.

“Uh... about nine... going on ten months?” Aliana raised an eyebrow. “Why?”

“Only ten months?” Rey asked, an expression that Aliana couldn’t quite read crossing her face. “It’s strange. On one hand it feels like everything’s gone by so fast, and yet it feels as though we’ve always been together. Is that normal?”

Aliana shrugged at this. “I think so? I’ve never been in a relationship this long before, but yeah it does feel like a lot less time has passed, and a lot more at the same time.”

Rey took Aliana’s hands and squeezed them, looking into the Sith’s eyes and feeling a sense of comfort at the deep crimson staring back at her. Ever since Aliana had fallen into her coma, Rey had gone from being worried sick, to being ashamed of herself, to desperately wanting Aliana to wake up so she could hold her again. And then, when she had woken up, she’d wanted to just hold her like the precious treasure she was and never let go. Having her back had really made it sink in just how much Aliana meant to her, and how easily she could have lost her.

And how easily she could lose her again.

“Aliana, I have something to ask you,” Rey began. “And I think this will be the most important question I ever ask in my life.”

Aliana’s brow furrowed slightly in confusion and a hint of alarm. She wasn’t sure what Rey was getting at, but she could tell from the look in the Jedi’s eyes that it was serious. “I’m listening.” As she said this, Rey gripped Aliana’s hands tighter and looked into her eyes in a way that almost seemed pleading.

“Will you marry me?”

Something Like... Darth Irus

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Aliana's eyes went wide with shock as she processed what she'd just heard. Had Rey really just proposed to her? Her mind was racing. It was great, but she also felt a twinge of fear. It had only been almost ten months, was that really enough time? Didn't they still have things to work through? She couldn't tell if her heart was pounding in her chest or if her injuries were flaring up again.

She squeezed Rey's hands and cleared her throat. "Rey... a-are you serious?"

"Absolutely," Rey nodded, squeezing Aliana's hand in return. "Maybe I'm being a little fast, maybe I'm not. I don't know, really. But I do know how I feel about you. I know I never want to give this up. I know that having you as my family is the greatest gift the galaxy could ever give to me. I want to cherish what we have for as long as we can. I want to marry you."

Aliana brought a hand up to her mouth, a warm sensation spreading through her chest as her eyes started to well up with tears. "Oh my god..." she whispered. "Oh my god this is actually happening..."

Rey swallowed the growing lump in her throat. Her entire body was tense with anticipation. She understood that her question may have put Aliana on the spot and she would need a moment to process it. She just wasn't sure how long she could stand the suspense. "...Alie?"

Aliana wiped her eyes, her look of astonishment slowly turning into one of the biggest grins she could manage. Her first few attempts to speak only produced quiet gasps and a sob before she managed to breathe out "Yes!"

Rey lunged forward and pulled Aliana into a tight embrace. She lifted the smaller woman in her arms, spinning them around the floor of the Fury's flight deck. Laughter and cheer filled the room as tears of joy streamed down their cheeks. Inevitably, Rey eased Aliana back to her feet but still held her close. "Thank you," she whispered.

"I should be thanking you," Aliana sighed happily as she laid a hand on Rey's cheek. "I never thought this would happen. Ever."

"Really?" Rey asked. "You never thought that, after everything, I'd want to marry you?" She leaned forward, resting her forehead against Aliana's. "Alie, I can't see myself with anyone else. Ever."

"I guess I was just waiting for the other boot to drop," Aliana said, her brow furrowing as she ran her fingers through Rey's hair. "That something would happen that would ruin everything..."

"Well the Force already tried that, and it didn't stick," Rey said with a smile. "I refuse to let anything get between us ever again." Her arms coiled tightly around the small of Aliana's back, holding the Sith as close to her as she could.

Aliana laid her head on Rey's shoulder and closed her eyes, a content sigh escaping her lips. "You really mean that. Oh my god, this really is going to be forever..." her arms snaked around Rey's neck as she clung to the Jedi as if afraid she'd float away if she let go.

"It really is," Rey said, her eyes fluttering closed as she held Aliana flush against her. "Nothing will tear us apart. Not Leia. Not Kylo Ren. Not even the Force itself."

Aliana whimpered softly as she felt Rey start to rock her on the spot. She held her tighter as the two swayed back and forth, each relishing in the other's comforting touch and scent. For a moment, everything was perfect. None of their troubles existed and there was only the two of them and the occasional tap of 2V going about his business.

Aliana lifted her head and kissed her fiancé, her hand running through the Jedi's hair as the faint taste of berries on Rey's lips offered her more comfort than she'd ever had in her life.

"I love you, Alie," Rey husked against Aliana's lips, her eyes stinging slightly as tears began to well up again.

"I love you too," Aliana whispered, pulling Rey in closer by the back of her neck and deepening the kiss. She mewled softly when she felt Rey's teeth bite down on her bottom lip.

Rey's hands found the back of Aliana's thighs before hoisting her up, encouraging her to wrap her legs around the taller woman's waist. She ran her tongue over the Jedi's lips before pushing through to explore her mouth. The sweet, spicy taste was heavy on her tongue. She couldn't get enough of it. Before she realized it, Rey had Aliana pressed up against the wall as the kiss only grew more and more intense.

Aliana winced slightly when her back hit the wall, but ignored the pain and focused only on Rey. She clung to the Jedi like a lifeline as she accepted her tongue into her mouth, curling her own around it and shuddering. Rey's forest-floor scent was overwhelming and she caught herself subtly grinding against Rey's waist.



Rey hummed against Aliana's mouth before pulling away to catch her breath. She looked at her lover, pupils blown wide and her breathing heavy. "...Huh... where did that come from?" she wondered aloud.

Aliana bit her lip as her eyes opened slightly, leaning forward and pressing her forehead to Rey's. "Maybe the fact that you just got engaged?" she purred, circling a finger around Rey's ear.

"Wow," Rey breathed, a lopsided grin growing on her face. "I wonder what it's going to feel like when we're actually married."

"Probably a lot of growling and ripping clothes," Aliana giggled, her finger still tracing circles around Rey's ear.

"Sounds good," Rey laughed, leaning into Aliana's touch. "I meant to learn how to sew, anyway."

Aliana smiled as she closed her eyes and kissed Rey's forehead. "This is the happiest moment of my life, sweetheart. I love you so much."

"I love you too," Rey crooned, easing Aliana back onto her feet while still holding tightly.

Aliana sighed softly and ran her fingers through Rey's hair. "Not that this isn't wonderful... but I really need to change," she said sheepishly.

“Oh! Sorry,” Rey said with a chuckle as she reluctantly stepped away from the embrace. “You go do that, then.”

“Thanks,” Aliana laughed awkwardly as she made her way toward their quarters. She stopped at the doorway and glanced back at Rey seductively. “Can’t wait to celebrate,” she purred before she disappeared behind the door.

Rey sucked in a breath. By the time Aliana was out of sight, her face was beet red. A thousand thoughts warred in her mind at once. Relief, excitement, anxiety, longing and everything in between sparked like mad in her thoughts. They all paled, however, to the overwhelming feeling of bliss.

She nearly didn’t notice 2V walking up beside her. “Are you quite alright miss R-” was as far as he got before Rey picked him up and swung him around not unlike she did with Aliana earlier.

“She said yes, 2V!” Rey exclaimed gleefully.

“Yes, I recall hearing as such,” the droid said casually, as if he wasn’t being spun about like mad.

Rey set him down and grinned wider than she ever had before. It was like all the joy and excitement had coiled up inside her and was ready to burst. And it did! She shook the droid by the arms as she almost squealed. “I can’t believe it! She said yes! She wants to marry me!”

“It is certainly an interesting turn of events,” 2V said. “Very few in the Beniko family ever took a spouse. Usually, it was my immediate masters and their next of kin who resided on this vessel.”

Rey tried to quiet her giggling and squirming long enough to ask 2V a question that had been on her mind for a while. “I meant to ask... how did Alie’s mother have her?”

“I believe it was by the standard means of human procreation,” 2V replied. “I have no records in my databanks about Miss Alie’s father, however. It seems that whatever relationship he and Lord Mayrik may have had began and ended with conception.”

“Oh...” Rey said quietly. “Wow, I... good for her I guess. She knew what she wanted out of that and she went and got it,” she smiled.

“Indeed. Lord Mayrik was always a very decisive Sith Lord,” 2V confirmed, a hint of fondness in his voice box. “She seldom ever doubted herself and was always quick with a plan of action. Her mind had some of the most impressive processing capabilities I’ve seen from any organic.”

“Really? How smart was she?” Rey asked, sitting down on the couch and motioning for 2V to join her.

“Quick as a whip, I believe the saying goes,” 2V said, taking Rey’s invitation to sit beside her. “Lord Mayrik was very fond of ‘being in the moment’ as she put it. Always trying to stay one step ahead of everyone else. As such, she devoted much of her efforts into thinking as quickly as possible. Solving logic puzzles in record time, honing her tactical thinking in simulations and skirmishes. In the heat of battle, she was known for alternating strategies on a beat. Truly impressive.”

“Wow,” Rey whistled. She’d certainly seen that same talent in Aliana, but it was far less honed. In fact, now that she thought about it, Aliana had a kind of ‘jack of all trades’ approach to the Force

and battle, and the only thing she'd really worked to master every inch of was lightsaber combat. That made sense, Rey thought, as Alie was mostly self-taught and had to learn on the fly to survive. "She sounds like she'd be a wonder to watch during a fight."

"I certainly wouldn't doubt it," 2V said. "Alas, spending most of my time aboard this ship means I have scarcely seen such combative displays from Lord Mayrik."

"That's quite the shame," Rey frowned.

"Amilyn?" Rey asked as she walked into the war room and made a beeline for the Admiral. "Could I talk to you? About something personal?"

"Of course, Rey," Amilyn said with her signature smile. Looking back to the Resistance officers she was speaking to, the Admiral excused herself to lead Rey over to an emptier part of the war room. "What did you need to talk about?"

Rey smiled at Amilyn, deciding to tell her the good news first. "Okay, first of all. Big news. I just asked Aliana to marry me!"

"Oh my goodness, really?" Amilyn gasped, placing a hand over her mouth. "That's fantastic! Do you need an officiator?"

"Yes, at some point. Sooner rather than later," Rey nodded, suddenly looking very nervous and sheepish. "But that's not what I wanted to talk to you about. I kinda need help with something a little more... sensitive? Oh that's a bad choice of words!"

Amilyn's smile fell as her brow furrowed in confusion. "Sensitive? As in... is it a Force related matter?" she asked. "I mean, I can help to the best of my ability, but my knowledge of such things is rather slim."

Rey groaned in exasperation. "No, it's... I'm trying to put together a nice evening for me and Alie?" She said, gesturing in a way as if to scream 'clue in please!'

"So a romantic evening? Like a romantic dinner an-" Amilyn's eyes widened as Rey's meaning began to register. "Oohhhh, I see," she said before blinking in greater confusion. "Wait, so you two still haven't...?"

Rey shook her head sheepishly. "No. I uh... I kinda wanted to make it special? Romantic?" She suddenly felt very foolish and hunched her shoulders up, looking away from Amilyn as she clutched her sides.

"Aww, that's so sweet," Amilyn smiled, holding a hand over her chest. "Even in the face of war, you have such a romantic heart, Rey. Alie's a very lucky woman."

Rey looked up and felt a twinge of relief course through her. "Thanks. That's what I wanted help with. I... don't really know how to make an evening romantic..."

"Oh, I see," Amilyn said. "Well, people tend to believe there are certain rules to romance, but they tend to forget the most important rule. It's all about the other person. Taking your spouse out dancing sounds romantic until you remember that your spouse has made it a point to say how much

she hates dancing. Planning a romantic evening will have to involve knowing what Aliana likes and doesn't like."

"Well she does love dinner, so that's a no brainer," Rey chuckled. Then an idea lit up. "Oh! I can ask 2V what recipes Mayrik used to cook that she hasn't had in a while!" As quickly as Rey's smile came, it faded. "Oh... unless it'd kill the mood to remind her of her mother..."

"Which brings us to the danger of overthinking things," Amilyn said with a smirk. "A good idea can sound like a terrible idea if you think about it long enough. But yes, a dinner is a good start."

"Okay, I'll just find something nice. Ask 2V what she likes and make that! I guess it'd be good enough, Alie always said she had simple tastes so I guess just dinner and being together would do it," Rey nodded.

"Sounds good," Amilyn nodded. "Aliana's a pragmatic soul so I doubt she'll be disappointed in the absence of any romantic flair."

"I don't think so, she's shown in the past that she really likes romance," Rey smiled. "Or at least she likes it when I do it."

"Well alright then," Amilyn smiled. "So, walk me through your basic idea for this night. How do you see it ending? What else are you planning to woo her with, as it were?"

"Um... well okay. First dinner. Maybe light some candles if I can find any, but flickering LEDs will work in a pinch. Maybe I can jury-rig something together," Rey said, leaning against the wall as she furrowed her brow. "Try and keep a conversation going without jumping on her right away I guess?"

"Make sure you're clear about your intentions at some point beforehand," Amilyn insisted. "Nothing is more romantic than clear communication."

"I guess so? I kinda wanted to be a little more... I dunno... seductive?" Rey suddenly felt very nervous and looked away from Amilyn again.

"Alright, do you know what you want to say?" Amilyn asked. "Let me hear it. I'll help you with your pitch, so to speak."

"I... wasn't going to say anything," Rey winced, feeling more and more self-conscious, especially at the prospect of repeating things she wanted to say to Aliana to literally anyone else. "Just... get everything set up and call her into the Fury."

"Good start," Amilyn nodded. "And you'll have dinner when she arrives?"

Rey nodded, looking down at the ground as she squeezed her sides.

"And move things to the bedroom from there?" Amilyn asked. "That's not a terrible plan. It's basic, but it leaves room open to adapt to other variables."

"Yeah, I guess so?" Rey glanced up. "I'm not really sure. I've never done something like this before."

Amilyn's lips pursed into a thin line. "Well, do you actually want to do this, or does something make you feel like you have to?"

“No, I do! I wanted to even before we got together! I’m just... I’m afraid I’ll screw things up,” Rey winced. “Do something wrong. Make Alie upset. She means a lot to me, and I know I mean a lot to her. But... that made her hold off before...”

“Well, then I’m going to say this,” Amilyn said. “Trust your instincts. You have a great talent for reverse engineering when you get your hands into something. I know you’ll figure out what to do when the moment comes.”

Rey smiled a little. “Thanks. I just hope it goes well. I don’t want to screw this up. I want this to happen.”

“You won’t,” Amilyn said, placing a hand on Rey’s shoulder. “If you can make a workable fighter out of literal scrap, you can give your fiance a single romantic evening.”

Rey nodded, feeling a lot less sure of herself than she had before talking to Amilyn, but nonetheless a little better. “Thanks. At least I have an idea in my head. I’ll... talk to you later, Amilyn.”

“Good luck, Rey,” Amilyn said with a parting smile before returning her attention to the holoterminal in the center of the war room.

“What was that about?” Rose asked as she and Leia both looked up in confusion. “Rey looked really nervous.”

“Oh, she just needed some advice on getting Alie into bed,” Amilyn explained before her brain caught up to stop her. She placed a hand over her mouth as her eyes widened, shocked at her own actions. “...Pretend you didn’t hear that.”

Leia scoffed and rolled her eyes. “See, this is why I didn’t trust you with the fleet’s location back on Dantooine.”

“You told next to no one about the fleet’s location because you’re paranoid,” Amilyn countered with a slight pout.

“Excuse me, we had a mole hiding in the base! And also you have loose lips,” Leia scoffed.

“My loose lips weren’t a problem for you when we were-”

“OKAY!” Leia said very loudly.

Rose blinked, finding no words to convey her feelings on the exchange that the growing red in her cheeks couldn’t already. “Oh dear.” She quickly packed up her things and made her way for the door. “Well, if you’ll both excuse me I need to be... not here!”

Aliana was practically skipping through the base as she approached her friends sitting under the mess tent. She slid in beside Paige and grinned at all of them. “Morning everyone! Hope you’re all doing lovely!” she practically giggled as she pulled a tray of rations toward herself.

“You’re uncharacteristically chipper today,” Poe noted with a narrowed gaze. “What happened?”

“Guess,” Aliana said with a wide grin, resting her chin against an open palm.

“Is the grease stain dead?” Finn guessed.

“Did you sever the Force Bond between him and Rey,” Rose asked.

“Did you actually overthrow the General?” Paige asked, her tone conveying that she was at least partially kidding.

Aliana shook her head. “No to all of those, but I’m working on them!” She couldn’t contain herself anymore and started squeeing. “Rey asked me to marry her!”

“Oh, kriff!” Poe exclaimed, a wide grin spreading on his face.

“Wow! Congrats!” Finn said, giving Aliana a hearty pat on the back. “That’s gotta be amazing to wait, you said yes, right?”

Aliana’s expression hardened only slightly as she looked at Finn. “No I’m completely giddy and over the moon because I turned her down, Finn. OF COURSE I SAID YES!”

“Okay!” Finn recoiled, holding both hands up in a surrender motion. “Just making sure!”

“Oh, my stars! I’m so happy for you both!” Rose said. “Are you two going to get married after the war?”

“Honestly? I’d rather do it as soon as possible,” Aliana shrugged. “A stray blaster bolt could ruin any long-term plans and I’d rather not run that risk.”

“Fair enough,” Poe said before taking a bite of polystarch. “Got anyone to officiate it? Gonna be bothering with a best man or anything?”

“I call dibs!” Finn said, raising his hand.

“Babe, you can’t call dibs on being the best man!” Poe protested.

“I think it’s gonna be a simple affair, so you just need to show up?” Aliana chuckled. “Besides, if I had to be stuck picking between my friends I’d just pick Talon and not have that battle with myself.”

“Well we’d all be honored to attend,” Paige said with a smile. “To be the first people to see a Jedi and a Sith getting married in... hell, a thousand years at least? It would be a privilege.”

“Thanks, I’d love to have you all there. I’d rather it be kept to just friends and family if possible, don’t really want to be crowded by Resistance grunts,” Aliana nodded. “I don’t suppose any of you know who could officiate?”

“I think the Admirals have the authority to wed people,” Rose suggested almost absent mindedly before taking a drink from her caff.

The entire table fell silent for a moment. Finn went to say something, but Paige held up a hand to delay him.

“...Oh, wait!” Rose said, jumping slightly in her seat.

“There it is,” Paige said with a smile.

“I’m an admiral! I can do it! Let me do it please?” Rose said excitedly as she bounced up and down in her seat.

“I would be delighted if you were to officiate,” Aliana said with a fond smile. The Sith had little time to react when Rose suddenly launched from her seat to pull her into a surprisingly strong hug.

“EEEEEEEE! THANKYOUTHANKYOUTHANKYOU!” Rose practically squealed. “Oh I’m so happy for the both of you! You’re going to be wives!”

“Yes we are!” Aliana squealed in kind, if slightly strained by Rose’s impressive grip.

“Sorry!” Rose said sheepishly as she backed up. “I love weddings!”

“It’s true,” Paige said. “I lost count how many times she watched our parents’ old wedding holo. She would cry every time.”

“Their vows were so good, though!” Rose said with a slight huff. “How could you not cry!?”

Aliana’s eyes widened as a thought occurred to her that she hadn’t considered before. “Oh... oh no, I’m gonna have to write vows... and read them in front of everyone!”

“Well, I mean vows aren’t really mandatory for weddings,” Paige offered. “You can just skip to the ‘I do’s’ if you want.”

“Yeah but if Rey does it, then I’m gonna have to!” Aliana whined. “It’s okay! I can do this! Just swallow your pride! And be vulnerable... around everyone...”

“Would it help if we just kept it a small ceremony?” Finn asked. “Just the three of us, plus Rose?”

“Yeah, and I promise not to record anything potentially embarrassing to use for blackmail later,” Poe quipped, earning a slap on the arm from Finn. “What? I said I wouldn’t!”

“Well... I kinda do want Talon there as well,” Aliana nodded. “And Rey should be involved in this too. Come to think of it, where is she?”

The table looked around to see if the Jedi was anywhere in sight, possibly grabbing an extra serving of rations. Alas, she was nowhere to be seen.

“I don’t know,” Poe said. “Haven’t seen her all day actually.”

“She was talking to Amilyn about something,” Rose said, sitting back in her seat and causally neglecting to mention that Amilyn had told them. “But she ran off looking kinda nervous.”

“Oof,” Poe said. “Someone might wanna go check on her.” His gaze turned to Aliana and Finn. “Hey, you guys can sense her, or something, right? Any idea where she is?”

Finn closed his eyes, extending his senses outward through the Force. His brow furrowed slightly as he delved deeper into concentration. “...I’m trying, but I can’t pick anything up,” he said. “I think she might be cloaking herself.”

Aliana pursed her lips and extended her own senses. She couldn’t pick up Rey’s energy anywhere, but there was a distinct ripple in the Dark Side coming from the Fury. Only she and Rey could go in

there or let anyone else in there so it had to be her. “Okay, I can sense the cloak. Why would she hide like that?” she asked aloud.

“...Dark side stuff?” Paige asked with a shrug.

“If it was dark side stuff, wouldn’t Alie know about it?” Poe countered with an arched brow.

“I guess she would,” Paige shrugged.

“I’ll see you guys later, I’m gonna go see what’s up,” Aliana said, standing up and running off for the Fury. The group gave a collective wave of farewell before returning to their meals.

“I hope it’s nothing bad,” Finn said with a slight frown. “We’ve had enough bad stuff happen to us for... at least a thousand lifetimes.”

Aliana pressed on the access panel for the Fury, only to find it under a lock. She raised an eyebrow and hit it again, the door only giving a failure sound and refusing to open. She hit the button for the intercom and leaned in toward the mic.

“Rey? Did you lock my ship?” She asked.

There was the distinct sound of clambering and fumbling from the other side of the intercom before she finally heard Rey’s voice. “Y-Yes! Yes! I, uh... have to do some important repairs in here! Reactor leak! Don’t come in!”

“A reactor leak?!” Aliana yelled, looking alarmed. “Rey, what’s going on?!”

“Don’t worry, love! I got everything under control!” Rey insisted. “I just need to work uninterrupted! I’ll get everything sorted out and call you back when I’m done! Promise!”

“When you start with reactor leak, I’m not exactly prone to not worrying!” Aliana pressed. “Rey, I’d rather the Fury blow up than you be caught in the blast!”

“I’ll be fine, Alie! I swear!” Rey said. “I just really need to concentrate!” A beat of silence passed before Rey added. “Oh! I had 2V take Porg racing into our quarters in the base, but I still think he needs to be fed! Why don’t you go do that while I work on this?”

Aliana put her hand on the door and tried to press her senses into the ship. “Rey, I’d feel a lot better if you opened the door!”

“The radiation might disagree with you on that,” Rey countered.

“Radiation!? I thought you said everything was fine!” Aliana balked in a panic.

Rey could be heard cursing under her breath before saying. “I mean- sweetie! I just really need you to trust me on this!”

“Rey please open the door!” Aliana said, raising her voice as her fingers started to tremble. In truth, she had no idea what was going on in there, and even with her senses still didn’t know if what she was seeing was good or not. She knew next to nothing about the ship’s reactor and had to pay to have it repaired when it broke down. ‘Fine’ could be actually fine, or it could be Rey just trying to make her feel better, she had no idea which.

Whether it was because Rey picked up the growing panic in Aliana's voice over the intercom, or if she could just feel the fear and anxiety rolling off of her through the Force, ultimately, it brought about the same result. "...Okay," she said, almost sounding defeated before the door made an audible clunking sound releasing the deadlock.

Aliana opened the door and rushed inside, and was immediately met with no alarms, no warning lights, nothing. She ran into the lounge, ignoring everything that wasn't Rey, and rushed to her fiancé and pulled her into a tight hug. "Rey, don't freak me out like that!" she pleaded as she buried her face into Rey's neck.

"Sorry," Rey said meekly, returning the hug immediately and burying her face in the endless curls of Aliana's hair.

"I don't hear any alarms, I thought you said there was a reactor leak?" Aliana said, pulling away and running a hand down the Jedi's cheek. "What's going on?"

Rey felt herself unable to meet Aliana's eyes. She cast her gaze to the floor just beside them. "...There's no reactor leak," she confessed. "I just... wanted to keep you out of the ship long enough for me to finish your surprise."

Aliana took the biggest sigh of relief in her life and fell limp against Rey, squeezing her shoulders tightly. "Then just tell me you're putting something together, Rey! Don't lie to me about a reactor leak, that could be certain doom for all I know!"

"I'm not good at lying on the spot," Rey said, her lips pursing into a thin line. "Honestly, the only thing on the ship that was in any way at risk is the kitchen." Her eyes suddenly widened as her gaze turned to the aforementioned room. "Oh, hell! The cushnip!"

She let go of Aliana and sped off toward the kitchen without another word. Aliana, deciding that the words "surprise" said all they needed to (and no longer having a small panic attack) just called out "I'll let you get back to it, then!" before turning and leaving the ship.

"Thanks! Love you!" Rey called out before sighing in relief. She saved the cushnip from being burned. The night wasn't ruined. Of course, she still had the fact that she nearly gave her fiancé a panic attack in an attempt to keep the surprise. That was working against her.

"I'll have to make the lighting extra romantic," she said aloud to herself. "...Somehow."

She looked around the cargo hold, turning over boxes and looking inside a few crates in vain. It seemed Aliana hadn't actually kept ahold of anything for lighting the ship. Or at least anything that wasn't a harsh, blue work light. She sighed and lowered the lid of the crate and stepped out onto the flight deck.

"2V? Does Alie have anything for mood lighting?" she asked.

"I believe Miss Alie fashioned a few lanterns out of lightsaber crystals a few years ago," 2V said, momentarily stopping his sweeping.

"Perfect. Are they in her workshop?"

"Affirmative," 2V nodded.

Rey dashed over to the other room, greeted with the familiar sight of a workbench and half finished gadgets of all sorts. The room used to be considerably less cluttered before she came around. All Alie did here was work on lightsabers. Rey, meanwhile, was a tinkerer at heart and often came to this room in her spare time. Spare time that wasn't kissing and cuddling her lover, that was.

"Alright now where is... ah!" Rey's eyes fell on what most definitely appeared to be lanterns and pulled them off of the shelves. And they still had their crystals inside. Perfect. She turned one of them over in her hands, looking for an activation switch of some kind, but to no avail. It seemed to have no electronics in it at all.

"Hey 2V?" she called out. "How do I light these?"

"Miss Alie ignited them with Force Lightning, Miss Rey!" 2V called back.

Rey shrugged and jolted the lantern with lightning. Then she nearly dropped it when the crystal became overcharged and started to pulsate with red light in a way that flickered and flared. It bathed the entire workshop in a warm, red glow that made Rey immediately feel relaxed. Like when Aliana cloaked the two of them in the Dark Side.

"A working lantern with nothing but the Force," Rey whispered, slightly mesmerized by what she held in her hand. "I can't believe Aliana made these. I wonder what else she made." She filed those thoughts as questions for later before grabbing the rest of the lanterns and making her way back to the flight deck. Her eyes combed the expansive space for the ideal positions to hang these lamps, igniting each of them with a jolt of lightning as she went. Soon their soothing illumination was in all corners of the deck.

It was only those jarring lights everywhere else that killed the mood.

"2V could you dim the rest of the lights on the flight deck?" she called out to the cockpit. She soon received her response when she was suddenly bathed in nothing but that warm red glow.

"Perfect."

With the lights dimmed and all the lanterns lit, Rey was suddenly overtaken by a mix of red, orange and yellow shimmering light. All of the lanterns running made the flight deck look practically like a grotto at sunset. Rey let out a small gasp as she took the sight in. She sat down on the sofa and stared at the way the lights danced over the walls and the ceiling. Had Aliana really just left these on a shelf somewhere? She imagined her fiance hunched over her workbench, creating these beautiful lights that made her ship appear almost magical. What did she even make them for? Was she just feeling inspired?

Rey realized that for all she knew about her, there were still so many things about Aliana she had never considered. So many sides to her she had yet to see. How many little secrets and quirks had she yet to learn. The thought of learning more and more about Alie, gradually, over the course of their lives, it excited Rey. It made her even more eager to marry this woman. To reach a point where she could know her completely.

"Miss Rey? I believe the side dish needs attending to!" 2V called out.

Kriff! The side dish!

Aliana stepped onto the flight deck looking confused when she found the place bathed in light from her flicker lanterns, wondering how they'd gotten out of her workshop. Then her eyes wandered to the table and saw it set for dinner and started piecing things together in her head.

"Aww, Rey made dinner?" she said to herself as she unhooked her lightsaber and set it on a nearby shelf. "She's so sweet!"

"Alie?" Rey called out from the kitchen. "Is that you?"

"Yeah, it's me," Alie called out, turning around and heading for the kitchen. "I got your comm saying to come back."

"Excellent!" Rey said, as she stepped out of the kitchen.

Aliana noticed two things. One. Rey had two glasses in her hands. Two. She was not wearing her usual dark jedi tunic, but rather a single loosely fitting and flowy sith robe. The fabric was very light. Light enough to indicate that she was wearing nothing underneath it, causing Aliana's cheeks to flush. Managing to pry her eyes away from the bare skin on Rey's chest that was exposed by the loose fitting robe, she met her lover's gaze.

"Well... I take it this is my surprise?" she asked coyly, trying not to sound as flustered as she was.

"Well we just got engaged," Rey smirked as she stepped closer, handing Aliana a glass and pulling her in by the cheek to kiss her softly. "I figured we should celebrate."

"Hmm, I like the way you think," Aliana purred as her eyes trailed down Rey's body again. "Kriff that robe looks good on you."

"You think?" Rey said, giving a slight twirl that allowed the garment to flow rather fetchingly. "I was worried it was too much."

"Not at all," Aliana shook her head as she took a sip from her glass, realizing it was Corellian wine. "You're stunning."

Rey took a moment to look at Aliana. She was in her usual Sith robes but seeing her in this warm lighting was nothing short of breathtaking. "If I'm stunning, you're a goddess," Rey crooned, leaning forward to give Aliana a soft kiss.

Aliana mewled and leaned into the kiss, her hand coming up to stroke Rey's cheek. "You're so sweet."

"You deserve sweet things," Rey cooed, placing a hand on the small of Alie's back. "Speaking of taste, let's have some dinner. I need you to validate my cooking before it gets cold."

"Oooh, now there's an enticing prospect," Aliana giggled as Rey guided her to the table. She sat down opposite her and glanced around the room. "So how'd you find my lanterns?"

"2V directed me to them," Rey said as they took a seat beside each other. "They're marvelous. I was surprised I found such ingenious machinery in your work room."

"There isn't any machinery," Aliana shook her head as she took a bite into Rey's cushnip. "It's all crystals and curved glass."

“They’re still marvelous,” Rey praised, her eyes fixed on the lamp closest to them. “And their light is so soothing. You made something truly wonderful, love.”

Aliana’s eyes widened slightly, her cheeks flushing in the dim light. “T-Thanks, Rey. That’s really sweet,” she said, taking another bite. “...Mmm! This is really good. Did you mix meats in this?”

“I did,” Rey nodded, taking a bit of her own. “I wasn’t sure if I got the seasoning just right so I thought more meats would make up the difference.”

“Seasoning is relative,” Aliana smiled. “Everyone likes different things, you just have to experiment. Me? I like to mix paprika and cayenne pepper together with some basil.”

“I know. That’s why I love yours so much.” Rey rested her chin on an open palm and looked at Aliana and smiled dreamily. “I didn’t know what flavor was before I met you.”

“To be fair, even salt would have seemed heavenly to you,” Aliana snickered as she took another bite. “Mmm! Did you put garlic in this?”

“I did,” Rey nodded before taking another bite. “Thought it would go well with the meat.” Internally, she was thankful that Aliana was approving of the deviations she made. Her inner tinkerer couldn’t help but want to translate that mindset into the kitchen, yet she worried her lover wouldn’t approve of her experimentation. It would have put a damper on the evening, she was certain.

“That’s the great thing about cushnip isn’t it? You can put whatever you want in it and it still comes out great,” Aliana nodded, taking another bite. “Though I guess if you put sugar in it, it’d be pretty terrible.”

“I mean a cushnip made of fruit might be good,” Rey said with a shrug. “Thought I suppose that would be more of a desert, wouldn’t it?”

Aliana nodded. “Mmhmm! And you have to make the shell a little differently. Bake it instead of frying it.”

“We’ll have to try that next chance we get.” She took another bite of the cushnip. Perhaps it was because Aliana was praising it, but she felt a growing appreciation for the unique flavor.

“I think I have the stuff to make it,” Aliana nodded as she took another bite and hummed in approval. “I might need to go to Nar Shaddaa to restock though.”

“Good thing we won’t have to justify the expense to High Command,” Rey said with a huff of laughter. “Little miss Sith leader.”

“Didn’t you once say I’d make a beautiful empress?” Aliana teased as she batted her eyelashes at Rey.

“I stand by that,” Rey said, leaning in for a soft, lingering kiss. She could taste the cushnip on her fiancé’s lips. With the hint of cinnamon she always seemed to carry, it made her not want to stop kissing her. It took more restraint than she would admit to pull away from her.

Aliana mewled happily as she sat back down in her seat. “You know, if I didn’t know any better I’d say you were trying to seduce me,” she purred.

“And if I were?” Rey asked silkily, a hand landing atop Aliana’s thigh.

Aliana bit her lip as she slid closer to Rey. “Well, it would certainly explain why you wore a thin robe with nothing underneath,” she husked.

“Am I so transparent?” Rey asked, scooting close enough that Aliana could see the growing red in her cheeks. “Or is that just the fabric?”

A sinister smirk spread across Aliana’s face. “Oh Mrs Beniko, you are anything but transparent.”

A very visible shudder rocked through Rey’s body, followed by a breathy moan. “Oh... call me that again?” she squeaked.

“Whatever you say, Mrs Beniko,” Aliana husked as she slid closer and wrapped her arm around Rey’s waist.

Rey bit her lip, leaning into Aliana. “Oh, I like that,” she cooed, an arm draping over her lover’s shoulder as she nuzzled into her hair. “It sounds so good when you say it.”

Aliana purred as she ran her fingers through Rey’s hair. Then, an idea struck her. An idea that could either ruin the mood or make Rey want to take her right on the table. An idea that could have lasting repercussions given how twitchy the Republic was.

An idea she couldn’t resist.

“You know... soon it’s going to be your name,” Aliana whispered as she pulled Rey closer to her. “I’d like... to give you another name on top of it.”

“Oh?” Rey asked with intrigue in her voice. “That’s right. Fancy people have middle names, don’t they?”

“Well yes, but I was thinking about something else,” Aliana said, looking up at Rey adoringly. “Something like... Darth Irus.”

Rey’s eyes widened, a small gasp falling from her lips. “You want to give me a Sith name?” Her voice was soft but heavy in surprise and disbelief.

Aliana nodded, looking into Rey’s eyes hopefully as she ran a hand down the Jedi’s cheek. “Is... that okay?”

Rey leaned forward, cupping Aliana’s face and kissing her passionately. She moaned her delight and approval against her lips and slipped her fingers into the tight curls of her hair. After a moment she pulled away, breathing heavily as she looked back into her fiancé’s enthralling crimson eyes. “I would be honored,” she whispered.

Aliana smiled brightly, almost desperately, and laid her forehead against Rey’s. “Thank you,” she whispered. “You have no idea how much that means to me.”

“Really?” Rey queried. “Is bequeathing a Sith name a very personal thing?”

Aliana nodded. “For my family it is. My mother spent months trying to decide my Sith name,” Aliana’s smile fell slightly. “It... it was on Corellia... when she gave it to me.”

Rey's eyes widened slightly as the implication of Aliana's words struck her. "...Oh, Alie." She pulled her tight hugs, burying her face in her hair. "I'll carry this name with pride."

"Thank you," Aliana whispered as she rubbed Rey's back, her smile returning as she pulled herself flush against Rey. The thin robe meant that she could feel Rey's skin under her fingers, simultaneously rough and calloused from exposure over the years, and soft in places where her scavenging gear had been it's thickest. Everything about the Jedi was rugged and weather-beaten, and it was a surprising comfort to her.

Rey shivered and squirmed slightly under Aliana's touch. A reaction that might convey discomfort were she not leaning harder into her. "I like that," she purred her own hands trailing lightly over Aliana's lovely frame.

"Me rubbing your back?" Aliana asked. When Rey nodded, Aliana sighed softly. "You'd probably like it more if this robe wasn't in the way."

Rey's lips pursed in contemplation. "You're probably right," she hummed. "...It's not... too soon for that, is it? Should we finish dinner first?"

"I guess that's up to you," Aliana said, pulling back and smiling warmly at Rey. "Do you want to finish dinner first... Mrs Beniko?"

Rey felt another shudder rock through her. "...Hey, 2V? Can you put the rest of this food in the conservator for us? Thanks!" With that, she rose from her seat, urgently pulling Aliana up with her.

"Of course, Miss Rey!" 2V acknowledged from the cockpit.

"Thank you!" Rey called back as she gripped Aliana's hand and practically dragged the Sith into their quarters.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter they're getting married.

Just Get Over Here, Beniko. And You Too Amorosa

Chapter Notes

This will be the last chapter for a while. Burnout and my attention being focused elsewhere means I've had to put it aside. I wanted to at least get to them getting married so the story had some satisfaction to it while it sits unedited for however long I'll be away.

Rey's eyes fluttered open as she felt the alarm comm start vibrating under her pillow. Curse the morning, she thought. All it ever did was interrupt her pleasant dreams. She reached under and clicked it to mute the incessant buzzing and returned her arm to where it truly belonged: Hugging the beautiful Sith that lay beside her. Rey smiled and pulled Aliana's sleeping form closer, her bare back pressing against her chest. As she blinked away the fog of a good night's rest, she watched as Aliana slept soundly. Sleeping through the alarm again, she thought.

As the haze of sleep began to ebb, the memories of last night resurfaced. A night of sheer, unbridled bliss filled with soothing words, fulfilled desires and just a modicum of awkward fumbling. Aliana assured her that Rey did marvelously for her first time and she could tell her lover was telling the truth. Just like with her Force training, Alie was a patient and supportive teacher, as Rey was a quick learner.

The heady aroma of their love making had mostly vacated the room, replaced with its usual chill. Rey liked their quarters cold. It gave her greater incentive to hold Aliana close.

Aliana stirred in her sleep and rolled over in Rey's arms, pressing her face against the Jedi's chest and snuggling under her chin. Rey loved how positively tiny and delicate Aliana looked when she was asleep and unconsciously cuddling. One could almost be forgiven for thinking that she wasn't an absurdly talented Sith Lord that could turn back system-killing superweapons.

'Actually, if she did that again then she'd just wipe herself out again and need to have a nap. Just like this,' Rey thought as she ran her fingers through Aliana's hair.

Aliana sighed happily under Rey's stroking and opened her eyes to look up at her. "Morning beautiful..." she mumbled.

"Morning, sweetheart," Rey cooed back, planting the gentlest of kisses atop Aliana's head. "I'd say I had the most wonderful dream, but I'm awake and you're still here."

Aliana giggled softly and snuggled into Rey's chest. "Someone got a lot more confident and smooth overnight," she purred.

"It helps when an incredibly talented and drop dead gorgeous Sith Lord takes your body to new heights it's never seen before," Rey said, stroking Aliana's hair affectionately. "I couldn't be happier with how last night went. You truly made it special, love. Thank you."

“I should be thanking you,” Aliana cooed, reaching a hand up to stroke Rey’s hair. “That was one of the best nights I’ve ever had.”

“Not bad for a first timer, then?” Rey said with a cheeky, lopsided smirk.

“Not at all,” Aliana purred, tilting her head back and gently biting Rey’s neck. “I’m going to be seeing stars for a week.”

Rey let out a slight gasp in surprise, her eyes fluttering closed at the pleasure. “Mmm... y-you’re not just saying that?”

“If I recall correctly,” Aliana said between bites, “I promised I’d never lie to you again...”

Rey wrapped her arms around Aliana, holding her close while leaning her head back to give her greater access to her neck. “Mmm, just checking,” she murmured blissfully. “I...I understand if you’ve had better. It was my first time after all.”

“I’m telling the truth, Rey,” Aliana said as she kissed her fiancé’s neck. “It really was the best.”

Rey squeaked, instinctively tightening her grip on Aliana. “It was truly amazing,” she cooed. “I love you so much, Alie. I can’t wait to marry you.”

Aliana pulled her lips back from Rey’s neck and looked up at her with a half-lidded gaze. “In that case, let’s not wait. Let’s do it today!”

Rey blinked, lifting her head up to look at Aliana with bewilderment. “...I... you’re serious?”

“Yes,” Aliana nodded eagerly, putting her hands on the back of Rey’s neck and pressing their foreheads together. “A ceremony isn’t hard to set up, and it’s just going to be our friends anyway so... let’s do it. Set aside an hour and we’ll be married. Just like that.”

Rey was fairly certain her heart skipped a beat. “...But... shouldn’t we wait until the war is over?” she asked. “Isn’t that what people do? They wait to get married until the war is over so they’ll have a reason to stay alive and keep fighting?”

“Rey, look at me,” Aliana said, sitting up and letting the covers fall off of her. Rey was greeted by a full view of Aliana’s naked form. At first she was pleasantly wondering where she was going with this, and then her eyes trailed down to her abdomen, where a discolored patch of skin highlighted her still healing lightsaber wound. “We might see the end of the war. But we also might not. I don’t want to take that chance. I don’t need to wait to have a reason to stay alive. You are my reason.”

Aliana’s words cut through her cleaner than any lightsaber. They touched in a way the Force never could. For a moment that stretched through eternity, Rey could only look at Aliana. She saw everything. Her beauty. Her pain. Her conviction. Her uncertainty. Her strength. Her vulnerability. All on display for her. What could she say in the face of all that?

Well, there was only one thing to say, really.

“Okay,” Rey said with a nod. “Let’s get married today.”

“Are you sure it’s a good idea to be redirecting people like this?” Amilyn asked as she followed Aliana around the base. The Sith had been gathering the few things she needed for her and Rey’s

small wedding, and calling in the few people she wanted to be there. The sole exception was Talon, who was in the middle of a skirmish and couldn't return. "It's a very busy time right now. I'm happy for the two of you, really I am. But couldn't you give it a few days at least?"

"It's only a few people and supplies being repurposed for the ceremony, Admiral," Aliana said dismissively before spotting a modest pile of lumber on one end of the corridor. "Oh, nice. This would make for a lovely brazier. Anyways, everything we're using is non essential. My fleet is handling most operations so Rose can go without admiral-ing for an evening."

"Look, I'm not going to get in your way, I'm just saying that we're all on high alert so maybe this isn't the best time," Amilyn asserted, helping Aliana haul a few things onto a hauling cart regardless.

"The First Order still doesn't know where we are," Aliana countered. "It's not like we have to worry about them crashing the wedding. And if they try, Rey and I will literally yank all their ships out of the sky and send them into the ocean. No sweat."

"Alie, you might be able to stop a plasma beam, but even you and Rey aren't invulnerable," Amilyn warned. "If you're really hell bent on this, then fine. I won't stop you. Just... maybe think about it? Please?"

Aliana stopped, turning to look at Amilyn. "Alright, I'll think about it." She stroked her chin as a ponderous expression crossed her face. "...Yup. Still getting married today. Thanks for the pep talk Admiral. I appreciate it."

Amilyn sighed. "Alright, if you say so. And congratulations."

Aliana climbed over the hill to the valley a few miles out from the base and found it. A clearing surrounded by forests and mountains, but with a single cliffside where the sunlight was clear. It was a perfect spot for a small, modest ceremony. So perfect, in fact, that Aliana almost couldn't believe her good fortune.

There was just the matter of the JM-5000 corvette that was parked right in the middle of it, with equipment laid out around it.

Aliana's brow furrowed. This wasn't one of her ships, at least since last she checked, and she didn't know anyone in the Resistance who would have a vessel like this. Still, she couldn't help but feel that it was very familiar.

Her eyes widened in clarity. "Oh, right."

"Well look at this," came a voice that stepped down the landing ramp of the corvette. "We get ready to come and find you and you just walk up to our doorstep. Ain't fate funny that way?"

"Yeah, it's hysterical," Aliana said with a roll of her eyes. "Look, I'm gonna need you to take your gear and clear out of here."

"Oh we'd love to be on our way, madam," the figure said as he stepped out of the shadow cast from his vessel. "We just gotta take you with us."

A bounty Hunter. Mando, given the helmet. The almost causal air in his voice indicated either overconfidence or hard earned experience, though Aliana wasn't exactly in the mood to figure out which was which.

"Yeah, I'm not going anywhere," Aliana said nonchalantly as she straightened her gloves. "I need this clearing, and I need you out of this clearing. Now you can either cooperate or I can just throw you from the cliffside, so which is it going to be?"

"Well, a Sith like you should know that Mando's don't much care for ultimatums," the bounty hunter said, pulling what appeared to be a charge detonator off of his belt. His thumb hovered over the button for a moment, the cross visor fixed on Aliana for a beat before he placed the device back on his belt. "Nah... that's too easy."

"Famous last words for every Mandalorian," Aliana scoffed as she drew her lightsaber. "Last chance to leave of your own accord, boy."

The Mando mirrored Aliana's actions by drawing a compact vibroblade from his back. "And miss a chance to experience the Scourge of the First Order for myself? Not a chance."

He lunged at Aliana, jet propulsion speeding him along as the two clashed blades. Aliana twisted her wrist and brought her lightsaber around as she turned, slashing down on the fuel line on his jetpack. The line was cut, and the fuel quickly ignited, causing the pack to explode and send the bounty hunter careening into the dirt.

Aliana flourished her lightsaber as she watched him struggle to his feet. "If you think you'll get a warrior's death, I promise you that you won't."

The Mando shook his head, likely trying to force the spots from his vision as he stood poised for another attack. "You're lucky the price on your heads is gonna cover the cost of that jetpack," he grunted.

"Caij, ya kriffin' idiot!" came a voice that boomed out of the corvettes intercom. "Just set off the charges and be done with it!"

As Caij reached for the detonator, Aliana reached out with the Force and locked his arm in place. She wrenched him into an upright position and pulled on every muscle in his body. "No. No explosives for you."

Caij writhed against Aliana's grip but to know avail. "Rrgh! Kriffin' witch!" he cursed.

"You came out here to fight a Sith and you weren't prepared?" Aliana cocked an eyebrow as she wrenched her arms back, pulling him down to his knees.

Caij found it difficult to vocally respond when his entire body seemingly disobeyed him. In truth, he wasn't expecting it to be this much of a challenge. Vaax insisted from the reports that these girls couldn't possibly be so much trouble and that the First Order just had an axe to grind against gay women who just happened to be in their way. He even had to talk his partner out of refusing to finish the job if they fell too easily. Now it seemed unlikely they were even going to collect at all."

"Alright, alright, Sith," came the voice over the intercom. "You made your point. Don't kill the dumb bastard. I'm comin' down."

Aliana kept Caij locked in place as she turned around and saw another, larger bounty hunter coming down the ramp. He was more heavily armored and by the looks of it, the captain. "I take it you're the one pulling this dog's leash?"

"And payin' his bills," the larger Mando scoffed, surprising everyone present and removing his helmet. He had the typical makings of a Mandalorian. Square jaw, military grade crew cut, seemingly permanent scowl on his face and an aesthetically impressive scar over his eye. "Vaax Bralor."

"Darth Amorosa," Aliana said, pursing her lips as she looked Vaax over. "So why don't you tell me why you're on my planet?"

"Good question. Now why would a pair of bounty hunters come after someone?" Vaax asked, his voice dripping with sarcasm as he stroked his beard theatrically. "What a mystery."

"Alright, you wanna play coy?" Aliana smirked, her hands igniting with crackling lightning. "Who hired you? Talk, or I start blasting."

Vaax's frown deepened as he crossed his arms. "The First Order," he said curtly. "Any other dumb questions you have for us, madam?"

"Watch your tone with me!" Aliana snapped. "I'm not in the mood for Mando nonsense today!"

She released Caij from her hold and with a sweep of her hand sent most of the equipment set up outside flying off the edge of the cliff. "Take your ship, get off my planet, and don't so much as set foot within the atmosphere again. Understood?"

Vaax narrowed his eyes at Aliana before shifting his gaze to Caij, who was just scrambling back to his feat. With a sigh, he uncrossed his arms and slacked his shoulders. "Alright. C'mon Caij."

"What!?" the other Mando balked. "You're just giving up!?"

"She already trashed most of our gear," Vaax said. "Even if we could beat her, the price they quoted us would be what it took to cover replacing it. There's no profit to be found here."

Aliana turned and grabbed Caij by the arm, wrenching him to his feet and shoving him toward Vaax. "You heard your master, little boy. Flee while you have the chance."

Caij turned to scowl at Aliana, or at least she assumed as much, considering the brat was still wearing his helmet. "You-

"Reel it in, Caij," Vaax said, placing a hand on his partner's shoulder. "It's not worth getting beaten a second time."

Caij seethed, cursing under his breath as he reluctantly made his way back to the corvette.

Aliana stood and watched as the ship ignited its engines and took off into the sky. That bounty hunters were after her was nothing new. She'd sold that very ship to about 17 different bounty hunters who all came after her. But that the First Order had tracked them to Oddessen? This was going to be important. They would need heavy fortifications and defenses, possibly from nearby Mid Rim systems.

That was a tomorrow problem, however.

She pulled out her comlink and tuned in to Rey's frequency. "Rey? I found a clearing where we can have the wedding."

"You have? Wonderful!" Rey cheer shined through, even against the slight filter of static from the com. "I was actually about to call you. I felt a flare in your power. Is everything alright?"

"Bounty Hunters followed us here," Aliana explained. "My guess is the First Order will know where we are within a month, once their ship gets within hailing range of the Supremacy."

"Oh. Well that's not good," Rey grimaced. "...Well, all the more reason for us to do this quickly then. I'll go fetch Rose."

"Good. I'll start clearing the debris and rocks," Aliana smiled, blowing Rey a kiss through the holoprojector. "Love you."

"Love you too, Alie," Rey cooed. "Stay safe."

"Only if you do too," Aliana said as she deactivated the comlink. She looked around at the scrap metal, rocks, sticks and few trees that had fallen and cracked her knuckles. "Alright. Time to get all this cleaned up."

The Fury had landed within only an hour and their friends were unloading what they needed. It was small and simple. Just a few niceties to make the wedding look memorable, and make at least one good holo. A few braziers had been lit, and instead of a typical archway like the Republic usually had, Aliana had set two ornate torches instead. As they were all in Wild Space, everyone had forgone formal wear, though Aliana and Rey had at least put on their cloaks.

Aliana herself, however, was in her quarters. She was staring at the leather-wrapped lightsaber she'd placed in a stand on her shelf.

"Well... I guess this is it," she laughed to herself. "...I'm getting married, Mom. Can you believe it? This like... never happens. I'm getting married to a Jedi. Try not to be too disappointed in me?"

Her words were met with silence. Aliana knew mother couldn't really hear her, much less her lightsaber. Only Jedi seemed to have the luxury of living after death. Still, it felt good to imagine. Especially with the holorecordings Rose and Poe salvaged, renewing her memories of the woman who raised her.

"I wish you could have met her. Well... you did meet her I suppose. I mean, I wish you got a chance to see the woman she became. She's come so far and... I feel so loved when I'm around her. It's incredible. It's like I have a family again. I... I just wish you got to be a part of that."

She stepped forward and tightened one of the leather ties that was coming loose, and then laid her hand over the hilt. Her eyes started to sting with unshed tears as she touched the leather. She didn't cry over her mother often anymore. Ten years ago she would cry over it every single day. Skywalker had at least paid for what he'd done, according to the records from the ship. But one of her mother's killers was still left to deal with.

She wiped her eyes and took her hand off the lightsaber. She didn't want to cry over this. Not today. Not when she was about to get married.

Turning for the door, she stopped and looked back at it. "I love you, Mom."

She closed the door behind her and headed for the ramp, where Rey was waiting.

"...You know, traditionally, at least one of the people getting married wears white," Aliana heard Paige say as she neared the both of them. Paige was fussing over Rey's robes, making sure they were just so.

"Well I don't have time to go shopping around for white robes, so these will have to do," Rey counted with a smirk. "Besides I think darker colors suit me better."

"And I never wear anything lighter than a medium grey," Aliana laughed as she joined them, still wiping her eyes. "Though I may need to touch up my eyes."

A wave of concern washed over Rey as she rushed over to Aliana. "Are you okay?" she asked, tenderly cupping her soon to be wife's face.

Aliana nodded. "Yeah, just... talking to Mom," she said, laying her hand over Rey's and smiling at the Jedi's touch.

Rey immediately understood, giving Aliana a sympathetic kiss atop her head. "I know she would be happy for you," she said gently.

"I know she would," Aliana agreed. "I just wish she could be here."

"Me too," Rey said, a playful smile creeping on her lips. "I wish my parents could be here too... just so I could see you kill them again."

"Is that supposed to be romantic?" Paige asked with a concerned look on her face.

"My parents were drunks who sold me for beer money," Rey said matter-of-factly. "Alie killed them for it years ago."

"...Oh." Paige's eyes widened with shock. "...Well, alright then. Carry on."

"Yes, let's," Aliana smiled as she took Rey's hand and pulled her over to where their friends were waiting.

The gathering was small. Just a handful of their closest friends with Rose waiting on a dias. Rey's attention wasn't on them however. It was on Aliana. The woman that was about to become her wife. The woman who looked utterly breathtaking in the warm light of the torches they walked past on the way to the dias.

"Are we all ready?" Rose asked as she looked at the two of them.

"Hang on!" came Poe's voice and the three of them turned to see Poe setting down a holoprojector. Within a few minutes, Talon was projected there, smiling at the both of them.

"Good! I didn't miss it!" she grinned. "Boss would have docked my pay if I missed it."

Rey silently arched a curious brow at Aliana, who was just smirking deviously.

“Alright then,” Rose said with a smile, folding her hands in front of her. “Friends and allies. We are gathered here today to witness these two women come together in the bonds of marriage. Showing not just ourselves, but the entire galaxy, that love is one of the most powerful forces in the universe.”

Aliana had to hold back a laugh. She could tell that Rose was very proud of this opening speech and wanted it to be poetic and memorable for how concise they asked for it to be.

“With that said, Darth Amorosa. Do you take this Jedi to be your lawfully wedded wife?” Rose asked.

Aliana smiled and nodded, squeezing Rey’s hand. “Yes I do.”

“And Rey, do you-”

“Yes!” Rey said excitedly, before clapping a hand over her mouth and looking sheepish. “Sorry...”

Rose resisted against the urge to roll her eyes, settling on a quiet sigh. “Well then, by the power vested in me by the Resistance High Command, I now pronounce you both to be wed.”

Aliana looked at Rey, but only for a second when the Jedi pounced on her and started kissing her passionately. Aliana wrapped her arms around her waist and held her tightly, actually lifting Rey off the ground and spinning her.

Everyone applauded vigorously, save for BB-8 who was spinning in circles and beeping in total, unadulterated joy. Poe was smiling at the both of them, while Finn had one of the biggest grins on his face they’d ever seen. Paige and Jannah were clapping into one hand, and Talon was whistling and yelling something in Sith.

Aliana and Rey broke apart, Aliana trailing her hand down her wife’s face. “It’s done... we’re married...”

“We are,” Rey said, her cheeks starting to ache with how wide she was smiling. “Any regrets?”

“Never,” Aliana said, leaning in for another, indulgent kiss, earning another round of hollering from their friends.

“Alright then,” Rose said with a smile, stepping off the dias. “Shall we head onto the reception?”

Rey turned to give a curious look at Rose. “Reception?”

“Sort of like an after party,” Rose explained. “You two wanted the wedding to be quick, but that doesn’t mean we can’t celebrate afterwards.”

“Oh no, what did you do, Rose?” Aliana groaned, half in exasperation, half in anticipation.

“It was more of a group decision than anything else,” Finn said with a grin. “We figured that this was an occasion worth celebrating.”

“But we knew that you still wanted to keep this mostly to our social circle, so we decided to have it in the Fury,” Poe added, pointing back to the corvette. “2V should be done setting everything up actually. That droid works fast.”

“Alright,” Aliana sighed with a smile. “I guess I can go for a drink with friends.” She wrapped an arm around her wife’s waist and pulled Rey closer. “And my beautiful wife...”

Rey squeaked, leaning into Aliana’s embrace as her grin grew impossibly wide. “I am never going to get tired of hearing that,” she giggled, wrapping her arms tightly around her Sith. Her wife.

“Me neither,” Aliana sighed happily as the two of them followed their friends toward the Fury. “I can’t believe it’s done... we’re married. I... I love you so much, Rey.”

“I love you too,” Rey mewled. “And nothing in the galaxy will ever change that.”

“So all that expense and the Sith still made mince-meat out of you?” Hux pursed his lips as he watched the holo of the bounty hunter. “Pathetic!”

“You left out the fact that the Sith had an entire fleet orbiting on standby,” Vaax deadpanned. “Your reports said she was tagging along with a crippled and nearly inconsequential Resistance. What we found was nothing of the sort.”

“What?!” Hux looked alarmed. “It’s only been a few months! How could the Resistance have rebuilt in such little time?!”

“Whoever you have in charge of intelligence should probably be fired,” Vaax shrugged.

Hux growled and shook his head. “It’s of no consequence. Just tell me where their base is and you can be on your way!”

“Well we can certainly have the coordinates sent over to you,” the Mando said, leaning back to prop his feet against the dashboard. “For double the price.”

“Double the price!?” Hux balked. “But you failed your mission!”

“Yeah, because your intel was lacking, which cost us nearly all of our equipment. Not to mention the data we’re sitting on is a lot more crucial to you now than when we started.” Vaax huffed. “Double the price. Take it or leave it.”

“This is absolutely ridiculous! I’ll-”

“You’ll have it,” Kylo Ren said as he stepped inside. “Double the price. Now give us the coordinates with no more delays.”

“Check the transfer,” Vaax ordered to Caij. The other Mando looked at the holoterminal, looking at their account.

“...Yup. It’s in there,” Caij nodded.

“Alright then,” Vaax pressed a button on the holoterminal. “Location of the Resistance base. As requested. Was that so hard?”

Kylo Ren pulled up the coordinates and growled when he realized where they were. “Wild Space?! It’ll take us weeks to get out there, much less plot a safe route through unexplored territory! That blasted Sith!” He slammed his fist on the panel and cut the transmission with the bounty hunters. “I’m going to make her suffer!”

Hux simply narrowed his eyes at Kylo Ren. After months of supposed calm and collected leadership, the temperamental, masochistic brat that he was familiar with was starting to show through the cracks once more. “Shall we divert ships from the Republic front to investigate, Supreme Leader?” he asked with an arched brow.

“No,” Kylo Ren shook his head. “We’ll deal with them in time, but the Republic is the more critical target. If the Republic falls, the Resistance will fall. Send all ships to-”

An alarm blared on the far end of the bridge, diverting the attention of both men.

“Supreme Leader, assaults have just been launched on twenty different training facilities!” one of the officers yelled.

“What!? How!?” Kylo Ren demanded.

“No doubt the deserters provided their rescuers with intel,” Hux deadpanned. “Who could have predicted such a thing?”

“Dammit! Scramble the fighters, I want a cruiser at each facility immediately!” Kylo Ren huffed as he headed for the door.

“Sir! Reports are coming in that another Sith is leading the assaults,” the officer called out before Kylo Ren could leave.

Ren’s brow furrowed. “A second? She’s taken an apprentice?” he asked underneath his breath before addressing the officer again. “Is it the scavenger?”

“It doesn’t match the descriptor, no sir,” the officer said.

“Then who is it?”

“A Twi’lek, sir,” the officer explained. “Scans indicate her name is Talon.”

Kylo Ren grimaced. Of course it was an alien. Amorosa no doubt took the girl under her wing to spite him specifically. “Gather as much information you can on this Twi’lek. I want the entire galaxy to know she is an enemy of the First Order.”

“Yes sir! Immediately!”

Rey and Aliana walked hand in hand back into the base. It had been a lovely evening drinking and having snacks with their friends, but they were more than eager to get back to work. As soon as they entered the war room, Leia looked up and scoffed.

“Where have you two been?” she asked. “We’ve just gotten word from Talon that they’ve engaged the First Order. What was so important that you couldn’t be here when we called for you?”

“Our wedding,” Aliana replied casually, placing an arm around Rey’s waist. “You are now talking to Mrs. and Mrs. Beniko.”

Leia blinked. “Wha- you two are married!? When did that happen?”

“A few hours ago,” Rey replied, resting her head atop Aliana’s. “We didn’t want any fuss so we had a quick ceremony.”

“I…” Leia sighed. “Fine, whatever. Just get over here, Beniko. And you too Amorosa.”

Aliana couldn’t help but feel a smug smile spread across her lips as the two of them made their way to the holoterminal in the center of the war room. “So you said that Talon engaged the First Order? That would explain why her transmission cut out at the reception. Is she okay?”

“She’s fine. None of her ships have been destroyed, but the First Order is trying to send out transmissions to their fleet,” Leia explained. “Several of them got through despite best efforts to jam them. We’re estimating at least 10 hours before they get swarmed.”

“How close is she to completing her objective?” Rey asked.

“They’ve evacuated one of the facilities,” Leia explained. “Progress has been slow due to not wanting to risk any unnecessary casualties, but even that’s not been a success.”

Aliana frowned, her attention fixed on the holomap. “Where’s the next closest facility from her current location?”

“Nathema,” Amilyn explained. “Talon avoided that one for some reason and sent a task force in her stead. Talon herself is in orbit around Zakuul. The facility there is in the rebuilt ruins of an old city.”

“The Empire that my ancestors rose up to vanquish,” Aliana huffed. “Go figure. Any word from the task force on Nathema?”

“The facility there is in a massive complex that stretches underground,” Amilyn explained. “It holds more children than any of the others, and the troopers there have started taking their weapons to their own recruits the moment our attack started.”

Aliana’s frown deepened. Nathema was a horrid, dreary, dead excuse of a planet from which the Force was completely vacant. Even the force blind felt uneasy in the void. Those who were Force sensitive had little chance of lasting for long on the planet’s surface without succumbing to madness or worse. To forcibly hold children there.

“Can we get any of them out?” she asked.

“It’s too delicate a situation,” Amilyn sighed. “Blaster fire, hostages, there isn’t much that can be done. I’ve ordered the squad to pull out for the time being until something else can be done.”

“I’ll go then,” Aliana said with a frown. “I’ll get those kids out and kill every last officer holding them there.”

Rey bristled, a disturbance in the Force coursing through her. Her grip on Aliana tightened instinctively. She recalled the stories her wife would tell her about Nathema during her training. The thought of Aliana going there alone filled her with dread. She couldn’t stomach the thought. She wouldn’t.

“I’m going with you,” Rey said firmly. “And no one is going to stop me.”

Aliana looked up at Rey and smiled. "I'd love it if you came with me," she said softly. "I'd feel a lot better about delving into the void with you at my side."

"It will take more than a dead world to rip us apart," Rey said with a warm smile. "Much, much more."

Amilyn and Leia watched the two of them, the Admiral feeling a small smile grow on her face. "That's rather inspirational," she said softly to Leia.

Leia's lips pursed into a thin line as her brow furrowed pensively. "...You two are certain you'll be able to handle yourselves out there?"

"We'd handle ourselves together than alone," Aliana nodded. "Nathema's a void in the Force, so without it we'd need to rely on each other to make up for the lack of senses. Going alone into the depths of Nathema is suicide."

The room was silent for a moment. The rest of High Command had varying looks of clarity and horror at the implications of Aliana's words. Leia was the first to break the silence.

"Well you two be careful then."

"Thanks," Aliana smiled as she gestured to Rey to follow her out of the War Room.

"Hey wait!" Poe exclaimed as he followed after them. "You're crazy if you think I'm letting the two of you go alone!"

Rey opened her mouth to speak, but then closed it. Her instinctive response was silenced by a thought that followed just on its heels. "...Actually, having you along would probably be for the best," Rey said with a smile. "You're the most Force blind person I know. You'd be the least affected by the Void."

"Hey, I'm coming too!" Rose said as she caught up with them. "Sith or no Sith, you're not taking on a whole battalion on your own. Not while I'm around!"

Aliana let out a small huff of amusement as she gave Rose's shoulder a friendly slap. "Well alright then. With the Resistance's best pilot and most promising new Admiral, how can we lose?"

Poe and Rose both clapped Aliana on the shoulder and followed them both to the Fury. As they weaved their way through the canyon, Poe gestured Aliana away from the others. "Hey, I just wanted to know if you and Rey ever had any kind of important talk after you woke up?"

Aliana raised an eyebrow. "Yes, we did. Why?"

Poe's shoulders loosened, a sigh of relief almost escaping his lips. "Just checking," he said with a smile. "I, uh... I heard about what happened with you two after Starkiller base. I made sure to have a talk with her about that. I'm just glad she followed up on what I said." A beat of silence passed before he added, "Granted, I probably should have made sure you two had that important talk before you got married. That would have been ideal."

Aliana laughed and nodded. "I guess I have you to thank for that," she smiled, clapping Poe on the shoulder. "That... that incident after Starkiller Base kept coming back to me for a while. That

was... probably the most scared I've been since I was attacked on Corellia. Thanks for getting through to her about it."

"Hey, you've saved my ass more times than I can count by now," Poe said plainly. "Trust me, it's literally the least I can do."

"You did a lot more than that," Aliana said quietly. "I... wasn't in a good place when all that happened. I was trying so hard to make up for lying to her that I kinda let her walk all over me. I'm not sure I could have brought that up on my own. So thank you for having my back. Things with Rey could have gone south really quickly if you hadn't done that."

"That's just what friends do," Poe grinned. "And... well, I know I'm not supposed to pick favorites, and I'm not, but... well, I mean it wasn't Rey who saved me after a Fighter crash."

Aliana laughed and leaned in, wrapping her arms around Poe's midsection and hugging him tightly. "I love you too, Poe."

Poe returned the hug gingerly, a soft chuckle rumbling in his throat. "Couldn't have said it better myself, Alie," he said. They enjoyed the embrace a moment longer before he pulled away. "Well... I better go tell my boyfriend that we're all going on a mission that he's not invited too. Wish me luck?"

"Good luck," Aliana laughed. "I'll prep the Fury for launch. Meet us there in twenty minutes."

"Will do," Poe said before heading down the other end of the corridor at a brisk pace.

"Alright, main reactor's online," Aliana said as she flicked a few switches. "Hyperdrive is charged, we're ready to go... right?" she asked, looking up at Rey.

"Yeah, that's it," Rey patted her on the shoulder. "Good job."

Aliana grinned widely at Rey and then at Rose, who only laughed. "You're adorable."

"Of course I am," Aliana winked. "Why else would Rey fall for me?"

"Are you baiting me to gush about your many, many qualities?" Rey teased, wrapping an arm around Aliana's waist and pulling her close. "If you wanted that, we could have exchanged vows back at the wedding?"

"We'll save the vows for when we're alone," Aliana purred as she laid a hand on Rey's shoulder and leaning in to kiss her neck.

"Girls!" Rose chided.

"Oh right! The kids!" Aliana exclaimed, pulling away from Rey and sitting back down in the captain's chair. "Okay, thrusters are primed, air lock is sealed, time to raise the landing gea-

"Turn on the stabilizers," Rey interjected.

"Right! Turn on the stabilizers, then raise the landing gear!" Aliana said, smiling sheepishly.

"That's what I meant, obviously!"

“Obviously,” Rey parroted with a lopsided grin.

Poe stepped onto the bridge and watched as Aliana was trying to lift the ship without the Force. “Everything fine?”

“She’s managing,” Rey chuckled. “She’ll get the hang of how to drive eventually.”

“It’s like watching a baby dugar trying to walk for the first time,” Rose said, shaking her head.

“Scoff!” Aliana scoffed indignantly.

“...did you just say ‘scoff’?” Poe asked. “Like verbally?”

“If you all could stop being patronizing schuttas, that’d be great,” Aliana huffed as she jerked the ship into the air suddenly. Everything jolted from the sudden shift in gravity and nearly fell to the floor. “Remember, nothing’s stopping me from driving us all into an asteroid.”

“Point taken,” Rey said as she steadied herself against the holocom. “Proceed, captain.”

The Fury stabilized and took off out of Odessen’s atmosphere and into open space. As Aliana engaged the Hyperdrive, 2V took over to manage the cockpit while everyone gathered on the flight deck.

“To think the First Order would kill children just to keep them from escaping...” Aliana whistled. “I’ll admit, I’ve seen a lot of gruesome things from them, but I didn’t think they went that far. That always seemed strictly a Jedi thing.”

“I bet that’s a popular opinion to have in Coruscant,” Poe said.

Rey pressed a few buttons on the holoterminal, bringing up a map of the facility on Nathema. “Jannah’s intel on the facility’s location should still be good, however, we have no way of knowing what about their defenses has changed since. The whole place could be equipped with cruiser busting ion cannons for all we know.”

“Chances are that Nathema’s defenses are the planet itself,” Aliana said. “A barren wasteland with no life and an atmosphere that’s finite? That’s one of the best places to hide. Any defenses would just give off energy signatures that would be significant coming from a planet with no other life.”

“So we go in, make sure you two don’t go crazy from the void, bust through their minimal defenses, grab the kids and get out?” Rose inquired.

“Depending on where they’ve set up base, it might be a little more complicated than that,” Aliana explained. “They’re killing their own recruits, which means they’re like to take them as human shields the moment we show up. This has to be a much more covert ordeal. Something sneakier. Isolate them and pick them off, that sort of thing.”

Poe pursed his lips into a thin line as he stroked his chin. “Well, in terms of stealth missions, I’ve historically been suited as more of the getaway pilot role.”

“Trust me, we’re going to need you on the ground,” Aliana said. “2V can get the ship prepped and take off faster than any human pilot. He’s programmed for emergency getaways. Once we get in orbit of Nathema, we can start scanning for their base and plan out our infiltration from there.”

“I don’t suppose we can rely on the galaxy’s greatest scavenger to help make some auxiliary gear if we need it?” Rose inquired, looking hopefully at Rey.

“We have enough scrap on the ship that I can cook something up for us if the necessity arises,” Rey confirmed with a nod.

“Some way to see in the dark would be good,” Aliana suggested. “Without the Force we can use all the augments we can get. There’s a few IR scanners in the back of the cargo bay, see if anything can be done with that.”

“I can work with that,” Rey said, preemptively cracking her knuckles. “Anything else?”

“We’ll have to see what our scans pick up when we get there,” Aliana said, her brow furrowing pensively.

“So get in orbit, scan, and plan our assault,” Aliana nodded as she leaned into Rey, who reflexively wrapped an arm around her. “We’ve got eight hours to Nathema, Everyone get some food and some sleep. Tomorrow, we’re saving some kids.”

Out of Anyone Else's Mouth, That Would Sound Like a Lie

Chapter Notes

Content Warning - This chapter contains mentions of child abuse, sexual assault and torture.

Nathema.

A barren, desolate wasteland where no life dwelled. A place completely devoid of the Force. Aliana had been to this planet once before, but had never landed due to the void being present even from orbit. It had once been a planet teeming with life, but then the Sith Lord Tenebrae consumed all life in a sick and twisted ritual to achieve immortality. Tenebrae would use this newfound power to eventually become the deadliest Sith the Galaxy had ever seen.

Aliana set down the datapad as the ship touched down on the surface. Already her powers felt further away than they had back on Odessen. She could still feel the Force, but it was as if there was a sheet of glass between her and it. Glass that was slowly closing in on her. Being attuned to the Dark Side meant she was immersed far deeper into the Force than Rey or Finn were, and that meant the void all the more terrifying.

She was vulnerable here.

"I don't like this," Poe said, his tone notably bereft of its usual sense of levity. "I feel freezing all of a sudden."

"The Force flows through all life, Poe," Rey explained. "Even you. Its absence from this world can be felt by all of us." She turned to Aliana with an anxious look. "Some of us more than others."

Aliana met her wife's gaze and extended a hand to her. Thankfully, Rey took it, and suddenly the glass didn't feel so overbearing. She found anchorage in the woman she loved and her power. It wasn't enough to stave off the Void around them completely, but it made it easier to think at least.

"Then we do what we came here to do and get out as quickly as possible," Rose rationalized as she holstered more gear to her belt.

"I can feel the void of this place crushing down around me," Aliana hissed, squeezing Rey's hand and pulling her closer. "It feels like it's going to devour me whole..."

Rey enveloped Aliana, placing a tender kiss atop her head as she rubbed comforting circles into her back. "I won't let it," Rey whispered, resolute determination causing power to roll off of her and over Aliana. "No matter how close to its maw you come, I will not let you fall." While she felt the pull of the Void stronger than most, she could at least handle its pull. It licked at her power like a hungry fire, tugged at it in the hopes it would make her unravel. She wouldn't. She had strength to spare for the task at hand. If she could shield Aliana from its pull as well, she would be a fool not to do so, or even try.

“Out of anyone else’s mouth, that would sound like a lie,” Aliana smiled up at her, leaning into her comforting embrace and closing her eyes. “C’mom. Let’s get these kids and get out.”

If Nathema was like a hungry maw waiting to devour them whole, the Sanitarium was of little comfort. The First Order had done minimal repairs to the ancient structure to prepare it for training Stormtroopers, and the entire complex was run down and barely holding together. Audio logs taken from the terminals detailed the brutal and unforgiving torment the children here went through, and how a few had been driven to insanity by the void and tried to kill the others. It didn’t take long for the group to realize that they had been Force Sensitive.

The First Order wasn’t just training children here. It was breaking them into unthinking, unfeeling killing machines. Elite troopers that could hunt and kill Jedi and Sith.

This wasn’t training. It was torture.

“I’m going to burn that bastard alive when I get my hands on him,” Aliana growled as she threw a datapad aside. They’d combed the depths but had yet to find where the supervisors had taken the children. They were quickly running out of places to look. Rose had theorized that perhaps they had managed to make a hidden passage that wasn’t on the schematics Jannah gave them by the time they got here. The scanners looked for such signs, freshly carved out stone out of the walls. Makeshift trapped doors to stash the children away. No such readings were found.

“They have to be around here somewhere,” Rey said, stepping over the body of a freshly cut down guard. “We would have known if they got the children off world. We’ll find them.”

“Yeah, but what happens when we do?” Poe asked, walking at Rey’s flank and eyeing the surrounding area. His eyes fell back upon a guard he took out with his blaster. The one of maybe half a dozen guards they encountered since they got here. The rest was automated weapons and the occasional rabid beast. “I’ve seen skeleton crews but even this sparse. They must have the rest of their forces hidden somewhere, ready to spring a trap.”

“Can you girls sense anything?” Rose asked,

“Nothing,” Aliana shook her head as they descended to the bottom floor. “It’s just a big empty void of nothing. It’s taking all of my energy not to just succumb to the void as it is. The Dark Side is a deeper part of the Force than the Light, so it’s pulling harder at me. And I’m not as strong in the Force as Rey is.”

“And even then, I can only extend my senses so far,” Rey supplied. “I can keep Alie shielded from the worst of it and defend myself well enough, but if I overexert myself, that Void’s going to become harder to resist.”

She chose not to voice the fact that fine tuned control was becoming increasingly difficult as of late. With what was on the line, voicing that little problem felt like it would have been an unnecessary morale killer. They passed through a small corridor that held many small rooms along its walls. Looking inside, there were beds with haphazardly strewn linens. These must have been the children’s rooms. Just as they were about to disregard them and head another way, there was a tiny whimper at the very end.

“Did you hear that?” Aliana asked, glancing toward the end of the corridor.

Rey nodded, cautiously choosing to take point as they continued down the hallway. As they drew closer, she began to sense something. Pain. Despair. Utter misery. The closer they drew to the end of the corridor, the more intensely she could feel these emotions thrumming in all directions. The emotions she sensed grew so intense with proximity that it almost deafened her to the actually audible sniffing and sobbing they were walking towards.

They made it to the final doorway in the corridor. A doorway that was without its actual door; one look in the other direction showed exactly why that was.

The motionless body of a stormtrooper laid against the crumpled remains of a durasteel door. If the entire facility didn't already reek of death, they might have been able to smell the troopers' entrails, which had been spilled out against the ruined metal scrap and stone floor beneath them. No doubt the result of whatever threw him against that door with enough force to break it off its hinges.

"The hell did this?" Poe asked, his face contorting in revulsion and fear.

Aliana and Rey shared looks of mutual understanding and worry. By that point, they knew the answer to that question

Aliana stepped closer and looked inside as Rey silently asked the other two to stay back. What awaited the Sith inside was what she expected while being no less heartbreaking.

There was a little human girl, who looked not unlike she did, huddled into a ball in the corner crying quietly. The clothes she was wearing looked tattered and filthy. Her hair was matted and unkempt. From here, Aliana could hear the slight scratching in the muffled whimpers, suggesting that this girl had been crying for awhile. From here, even she could sense the utter torment the young child was giving off. It was the loudest thing she could sense, seeming more solid and real than even looking at her.

Aliana stepped over the body and into the room, gently knocking on the doorframe to alert the girl that she was there. The misery soon gave way to reflexive panic as the girl looked up. Her eyes were red and puffy with tears and blown wide with terror. Aliana could feel the force responding to her panic despite them being surrounded by the Void of Nathema.

"S-Stay back!" the girl shouted, her raspy voice making it sound more like a plea than a demand.

"I'm not going to hurt you," Aliana said quietly, though staying exactly where she stood. "I'd like to help if you'll let me."

The girl scrambled back against the wall behind her, still looking no less terrified. "Stay away from me!" she shouted again, the Force rippling around her. The ripple was strong enough for Aliana and Rey to sense, but not enough to do anything. Not like it did with that Stormtrooper. It was clear the girl was powerful, but she was nearing the end of her rope. If nothing was done soon, the Void would swallow all that she does.

"It's okay," Aliana insisted, taking a single step back to placate the girl. "I'm here to help you and the others."

The fear did not ebb in the girl's eyes, but she did not scream again.

"Can you tell me what happened?" Aliana asked.

The girl wound herself into a tighter ball and looked at the dead Stormtrooper. “He came to hurt me,” she said quietly. “He pointed his laser gun at me...”

“Do you know why?” Aliana asked, squatting down in the hopes of appearing less frightening.

“Because I was bad,” the girl said quietly. “I zapped a teacher.”

“How’d you zap them?” Aliana asked, starting to piece together what the girl had done.

“With my hands...” the girl whimpered quietly.

“Like this?” Aliana asked, before holding her hand up to the power conduit and channeling lightning into it, causing the lights to surge briefly before shutting off again.

The girl gasped in shock and hid her face behind her knees again. “Don’t hurt me!” she yelled, giving off another defensive surge of the force. This one was even weaker than just a moment ago. She was definitely in trouble.

“I’m not going to hurt you,” Aliana insisted, holding her hands behind her back. “We can help you.”

“No! You just want to hurt me like the other grown ups!” the child shot back.

“I’m going to make the other grown ups suffer for what they’ve done to you,” Aliana said, her brow furrowing.

The girl was quiet for a moment before looking back up at Aliana, her eyes rife with confusion. “...R-Really?” she asked.

Aliana nodded.

“But... I was bad.”

“Not to me you weren’t.” Aliana smiled at the girl. She reminded her of herself when she was little, in more ways than just the fact that she looked like she was looking into the past. She remembered being scared and Force Sensitive and not knowing what to do about it. She’d had her mother to guide her, but this girl only had Stormtroopers beating her for her insolence. One of many poor, defenseless children being shaped by pain and suffering to become cruel, unfeeling killers. This girl was being trained to kill her.

But not if she could stop it.

“You don’t have to let them hurt you,” Aliana said, slowly kneeling down so that she could better look at the girl at her level. “You don’t have to stay here and let the next grown up try to attack you. I have some friends. We can get you out of here.”

The girl curled down into a tighter ball as she stared at Aliana, simultaneously terrified and intrigued. “What... what’s out of here?”

Aliana smiled and sat down on the floor. “Out of here means off the planet. To another planet, where you won’t feel the cold trying to get you. I can teach you to understand the things you can do, like zapping people. I can teach you to protect yourself.”

The girl looked surprised. “You... you can feel the cold?” she asked raspily. “The grown ups say it’s fake!”

“Yes, I can feel it. But it’s not here when you’re on another planet,” Aliana explained. “Other planets feel better. Safer. I know a place where you will be completely safe. Where there are other kids like you.”

“Really?” the girl asked, fear gradually seeping out of her aura. “I don’t have to be cold anymore?”

“No,” Aliana shook her head with a smile. “My name is Darth Amorosa. I’m a Sith Lord. And I’d like to teach you.”

The girl gasped, the tension she had slowly let go of finally coming back. “Sith!? The grown ups said Sith are bad!”

“And are you going to listen to grown ups that tried to hurt you?” Aliana raised an eyebrow.

The girl was quiet for a moment, Aliana’s words suddenly giving her much to think about. There was still uncertainty Aliana could sense in her, but the fear was starting to fade. As was her energy. The young child attempted to stand up, but fumbled back onto the floor.

“I’m cold...” she whimpered. “And tired.”

Aliana unfastened her cloak and pulled it off, approaching the girl and wrapping it around her shoulders. The girl didn’t object, and seemed to settle slightly when the cloak was fastened around her tiny body.

“Can I carry you out?” Aliana asked softly.

The child was quiet for a moment before nodding meekly, clutching the robe as close to herself as she could. Aliana smiled and lifted the girl into her arms, bracing her head against her shoulder and carrying her out of the dorm. The others were watching quietly, with Rey smiling brightly, as she returned to them.

“They really tortured this girl?” Poe asked.

Aliana nodded. “They did. She’s Force Sensitive, and quite strong too,” she explained as they turned to take another route. “She’s going to need someone to care for her when we reach Odessen. She’s in an especially bad state.”

Rey watched as the girl curled deeper into Aliana’s arms, trying to stave off the frigid vacuum of life and Force energy that surrounded them. Her heart panged with sympathy while also being mesmerised at how gentle and caring her wife was to the poor child. “Should we get her back to the ship?”

“We should. 2V can tend to her and keep her from being too affected. He can probably use something in the cargo bay to stave off the void,” Aliana nodded as she rubbed the girl’s back. “Sweetie, I need to give you to one of my friends so he can take you somewhere safe. Is that okay?”

The girl shivered and sniffled before weakly nodding in the crook of Aliana’s neck. “...Okay.”

Aliana approached Poe and gestured for him to come closer. "This is Poe," she said, still cradling the girl. "He's going to take good care of you. And my droid, 2V, is going to make sure you're safe." She looked up at Poe with pleading eyes. "You'll take care of her and get the ship ready to leave, won't you?"

"Absolutely," Poe nodded, smiling at the girl as she poked her head out to look at him. "Don't worry kid. We'll all take good care of you. Any friend of Alie is a friend of ours."

"Okay..." the girl whimpered as Aliana handed her over to Poe. She didn't cling to him as emphatically as she did to Aliana, but nevertheless held on as Poe nodded goodbye to the others and turned to carry her out of the Sanitarium.

As Aliana watched them leave, a chill ran up her spine. "I don't like the thought of the First Order finding out so many of these kids are Force Sensitive."

"If they could detect such a thing, why didn't they realize Finn was Force sensitive?" Rose asked as she inspected the now vacant room the girl resided in.

"That might be our fault," Rey responded solemnly. "Aliana stopped the Starkiller weapon. I killed their Supreme Leader and humiliated the other. They had to recalibrate their arsenal to better counter Force sensitives."

"I'm still not certain they're actually aware of the abilities these kids have," Aliana sighed as they pressed deeper into the Sanitarium. "A lot of them have been tortured in ways that aren't intended to be used on Force Sensitives. Here on Nathema you'd need to be either me or Rey to tell anyway. They're training them to fight the Force here. To kill the both of us."

Rey's expression turned grave. "...So if they aren't aware of these children's connection to the Force, they won't realize that the Void here is killing them," she realized, her face turning pale. "We have to find the others. Now."

"But where else can they be?" Rose asked, looking more distressed by the moment. "The scanners aren't picking up any other exits or entrances. And we don't know why that girl was left behind."

"She killed the guard," Aliana explained. "By that point, whoever is in charge here would reason that she was more trouble than she was worth. Furthermore, there are still deeper sections in this facility, though. According to Darth Caida's records, there's a vault at the very bottom of the facility. She hid there once."

"Is there any information on how we can get there?" Rey asked. "Every passageway we've found looks like it's been walled off or caved in for years."

"Well our ability to use the Force is diminished," Aliana said as she ran her hand over a wall. She could still feel the tiniest echoes, like stars in the pitch black sky. "But we still have the deadliest cutting tool the galaxy has ever seen right at our hips."

Rose looked uneasy at Aliana's suggestion. "Are you sure we should go about cutting through the walls of this decrepit place?"

"We have children counting on us," Rey said, already drawing her lightsaber and training it's orange blade on the sealed wall of the corridor. "Every second wasted debating brings them closer to death and I will not stand for it."

The blade bore into the stone, turning it into molten hot trail of rock as it purposefully carved through. Aliana joined her, plunging her crimson blade into the rock as well. She could feel it poke through the other side and worked in tandem with Rey to quickly carve a large hole in the stone wall. As they deactivated their weapons, they saw a series of old maintenance tunnels leading further down. They smiled at each other for their achievements.

“There’s the way down,” Aliana smiled, gesturing Rey through. “After you.”

Rey nodded and took point, her lightsaber illuminating the otherwise dark corridor. Rose followed after Aliana, her blaster at the ready.

“I have a bad feeling about this,” she murmured under her breath. Silently, she was hoping that it was simply her instincts talking and not the effect of this Void that Aliana and Rey were talking about. Because if it was having this kind of effect on her, she couldn’t fathom how bad it was for them.

The tense silence hung in the air before Rey lifted a hand to bring them to a halt. “You hear that?” she asked, her attention focused ahead on the currently unlit depths of the tunnel. Distant chattering. Someone else was down here. Neither she nor Aliana could sense anyone, but she could certainly hear them. “We’re getting close.”

Aliana stepped forward and took point, beckoning the other two to slowly follow. She could hear it as well. Three distinct voices. One of them had a robotic filter to it. “One of them sounds like they’re in a mask of some sort,” she said, motioning for Rose to take a position behind and between them. “A Knight?”

“If it is, he’ll be feeling the effects of the Void, same as us,” Rey deduced, her rationale tone suddenly shifting to one Aliana could only describe as bloodlust. “We should still have the advantage. They’re nothing.”

Aliana glanced at Rey with a look of concern on her face. “What was that?” she asked.

Rey blinked, her attention turned back to Aliana. “Oh, um, sorry love,” she said somewhat sheepishly. “I just... thought back to the Throne Room. Not a pleasant memory.”

Aliana stepped closer and squeezed Rey’s arm. “Be careful, Rey. Arrogance has killed more Sith and Jedi than a lightsaber ever could,” she warned. “No matter how pathetic your enemy is, *always* take them seriously.”

“I will,” Rey said, holding Aliana’s hand over her own. “They won’t get another shot on you. I promise.”

“Good,” Aliana smiled. She knew that wasn’t going to be the end of that issue, but she knew now to watch out for it. She’d read something in Leia’s reports about Rey’s increasingly violent tendencies and she hadn’t taken them seriously, but seeing the certainty and arrogance right in front of her had been a big red flag.

They pushed deeper down the corridor and came up to a large, steel blast door. Aliana silently beckoned to Rose to approach and gestured to Rey to wire the panel to open the door. With a wave of her hand and an effort of will, the panel opened and revealed the wiring beneath. A moment of experimentation resulted in slight buzzing and crackling from the conductive material.

“The wiring is live,” Rey confirmed. “They have power down here.”

“Meaning that they can have any sort of traps down here,” Rose grimaced, pressed against the doorframe ready to fire the moment it opened.

“Just hold tight,” Aliana nodded. “Rey I’m going to need you to open that door the second I say so, so get it ready.”

She pressed her ear to the steel and listened carefully. On the other side she could hear the robotic voice arguing with what sounded like a medical officer.

“My Lord, I can’t just turn three hundred children into bodies!” the officer pleaded. “My research has been extensive, and I’ll lose so much progress! Not to mention these recruits are valuable!”

“The Sith’s forces are tearing through Wild Space and tearing apart our operations,” the Knight on the other side of the door said dismissively. “They’re going to find nothing but carnage.”

“So Ren will just throw away recruits for the sake of some psychological warfare?!” the officer demanded. “Is everything we stood for being burned to ash for the sake of his pissing contest with the Sith and her pet Jedi?!”

“Watch your tone with me, woman!” the Knight scolded her. “Or you’ll find yourself chained in the crew quarters.” Aliana silently gagged and gestured for Rey to open the door.

The wire was cut. The door opened.

Initiative was something that Aliana considered herself adept at, to say the least. The ability to be quick and accurate often superseded raw strength. She saw the masked visage of Stormtroopers turn to her as she dashed through the door. She saw how they tried to reach for their blasters to stop her advance.

She then saw as they fell onto the floor in pieces as her lightsaber left a blinding whirlwind of red in its wake. One of the Knights whipped his head away from the woman he was talking to, a Devaronian, and looked upon Aliana as she fixed him with a deadly glare. Rey and Rose swiftly stood by her side, their own weapons drawn and ready to kill. Rather than reach for his own however, the knight folded his arms and somehow managed to look notably smug at them from beneath his mask.

“So, you actually decided to show yourselves,” he mused. “The Supreme Leader said you’d come.”

“I’d have been here sooner, but I was recovering from surgery,” Aliana scowled as she trained her lightsaber on the Knight. “You’re surrounded, Vicrul. There’s nowhere to go.”

“You remembered my name,” Vicrul said. “I suppose I should feel honored, shouldn’t I?”

“You’re notable for your especially stupid helmet,” Rey said snidely. “Now tell us where the children are and maybe we’ll spare your life.”

“I don’t think that will be necessary,” Vicrul countered before pressing a button on his belt.

They suddenly heard the deep thrum of rising energy. Large conduits that were hidden in the harsh shadows of the room were suddenly alight with green. The coils glowed and crackled with power.

Power that was then swiftly shot at the three of them at high speed. Oh, kriff.

The bolts of concentrated, undoubtedly lethal energy did not strike flesh, however, but instead an unseen barrier that repelled the assault. An extended hand showed to everyone present that the barrier came from Rey, who suddenly dropped to a knee once the large coils powered back down. To call upon the power needed to protect them purely on reflex was not an effortless task, especially not when surrounded by the Void.

“What did you think?” Vicrul asked snidely. “These ruins are filled with these fun little toys. If you’re not careful, you’ll tucker yourselves right out before we get to the main event.”

Aliana glanced out of the corner of her eye to see Rose slipping into the shadows. Of course! With the void crushing down around them, Vicrul was just as Force-blind as they were. He couldn’t sense anything. And like most of the Knights (and snoke) he was painfully arrogant. He didn’t even pay attention to Rose the entire time.

“...Main event?” Aliana asked, lowering her lightsaber slightly and gesturing for Rey to stand down. An easy task, considering Rey was still recovering from her exertion.

“Oh, indeed,” Vicrul confirmed, sadism rich in his filtered voice. “The depths of Nathema contain dark secrets that were long considered too dangerous to use. Not even the most deadly of the Sith dared to try. The Supreme Leader has ordered that one be reserved just for you.”

“Really?” Aliana narrowed her eyes as she glanced around the room. She deactivated her lightsaber and hooked it back onto her belt.

In the shadows, Rose had reached a turret and shut it down quietly. Aliana cleared her throat and cracked her knuckles to cover the sound of its power draining. Vicrul still hadn’t taken any notice of Rose as she slipped over to the other turret. Though it looked as though someone did.

“Uh, sir?” the Devaronian interjected. “I think-”

“Quiet, woman,” Vicrul cut through. “I’ve had enough of your ranting.”

“But sir! One of the-” The remaining words suddenly wouldn’t come. Noise and air were halted in the officer’s throat as some unseen power clamping down on it. She choked and gasped for breath fruitlessly, her eyes wide with panic and her hands clawed at her neck.

“One more word out of you and I’ll rip your tongue out of your skull,” Vicrul warned venomously before letting go of the officer's throat. He saw her collapse onto the floor and heard her gasp to refill her lungs when he otherwise would have heard the deactivation of another turret.

“Now, where was I?”

“You were about to tell me the special dark secret,” Aliana said as she glanced at Rose, who was still trying to disable the other turret.

“Ah yes,” he said, grinning behind his helm. “Well I’m sure that by now you two have felt the pull of the Void, yes?”

They nodded.

“Quite a dreadful thing to feel, isn’t it?” he said with a disdainful chuckle. “Still, it’s not without its benefits. Like presenting the opportunity to strip down formidable minds layer by stubborn layer and making them more... suggestible.”

Vicrul began pacing before the two of them, his perceived security causing him to have a casual air in his stride. “That is one such power that the Supreme Leader seeks in this place. The power to empty a powerful force user of their resolve, their will, and condition them to serve faithfully and without question. With this power, he will crush any opposition in his way and bolster his own power. That is the main event, Sith. A future where the two of you will be conditioned to kneel before him for the rest of your days.”

Aliana arched a brow and scoffed. “As tempting as that sounds, Vicrul, I’m a married woman,” she said snidely as Rose finished deactivating the other turret and very quietly drawing her pistol. She just had to keep his attention focused on her.

“Oh, you needn’t worry about that,” Vicrul huffed. “The ‘people’ you were and the memories tied to them will forever be gone before today is done. You will know of nothing else than how best to serve your master.”

“So he’s upgraded from gaslighting to mind control?” Rey asked, her voice dripping with disgust. “That does certainly sound like him.”

“So let me get this straight Vicrul,” Aliana said with an air of disinterest. She knew she wasn’t going to like what she heard, but Rose needed all the time she could buy her. “Ren wants experimental mind control tech... just to get two Force users to fight on his side?”

“Oh the Supreme Leader has big plans with the power we have discovered for him,” Vicrul assured. “But you will be the first to be subjected to it. As a personal gift to him from his fellow Knights.”

Aliana glanced at Rey, who had only just noticed Rose slipping around the shadows with her blaster drawn, grabbing a few more pieces of tech. She wasn’t sure what the Admiral was doing, but trusted her judgment. Rey nodded at her to continue.

“Personal gift?” Aliana arched a brow.

“To serve him however he chooses,” Vicrul clarified a vindictive lilt to his slightly garbled timbre. “Bodyguards, executioners... concubines if you’re lucky.”

Rey’s stomach churned in reflexive disgust. A feeling worsened by the Void around them. Aliana was more prepared, however. She’d known that Kylo Ren had been dreaming of exacting revenge on the both of them in extremely puerile ways. She’d been able to sense it from him since their duel on Jakku. He was an entitled manchild who was easier to read than a children’s pop-up book.

Kriffing hell, Aliana thought, the man had a wire running along the outside of his lightsaber. It didn’t take a genius to realize he was pathetically compensating for something. She chuckled at her own joke and put on a show of being amused. “The man’s that bad at getting a date, is he?”

The disgust Rey felt was forgotten, or perhaps simply offset, by a sudden set of snickering at her wife’s words. “Yeah. It doesn’t help that he’s *really* greasy.”

“You can mind-control me to be straight, but that’s not going to help when Poe is right outside,” Aliana laughed.

“Aw, you wouldn’t go for Finn?” Rey said with a slight pout. “He’s adorable!”

The malevolent grin they heard in Vicrul’s voice vanished completely as he watched the two women banter playfully before him. “...You know what? Keep laughing, you sows. It will make emptying you of that pestilence all the sweeter.” He reached for the button on his belt once again to prime the energy turrets.

Nothing happened.

“You know, if you want to empty someone’s head of everything that makes them who they are, I have a much more direct way of doing that,” Aliana smirked.

Vicrul arched a brow behind his mask, and it was the last thing he ever did. Rose lifted her blaster and fired a point-blank shot to the back of his head. The Knight slumped down to the floor and crumpled into a heap.

“Thanks Rose,” Aliana sighed in relief.

“Thank *you*, Mrs. Beniko,” Rose said back before she blew on the smoking barrel of her blaster and rejoined the other two. “You made for a perfect distraction.”

Aliana smiled at that as their collective attention turned back to the Devaronian, who fell silent after Vicrul had strangled and threatened her life. “So, I don’t suppose you’ll be leaping to avenge his honor, Miss...?”

“...Doctor,” the officer said before rising back to her feet and dusting off her uniform. “Doctor Fae Nymir. And no, I will not. I was subcontracted by the First Order. They would never employ a Devaronian as an official medical professional.”

“Well then Doctor Nymir, you’re going to tell us everything you know,” Aliana said, unhooking her lightsaber. “But first, the kids.”

Fae clenched visibly at that. “Right! Um, they’re in the holding cells closest to the vault. Down this corridor and past three checkpoints. You can’t miss them!”

Aliana nodded to Rose, who nodded back and ran off to find the kids, leaving the doctor alone with the two Force users.

“Now Doctor. What were you doing to these kids?” Aliana demanded. “And speak quickly. Your life depends on it.”

Nymir wringed her hands out nervously as she fought to retain some semblance of her composure. “W-Well, I was brought in as a general physician to keep the children healthy. When I began to realize that they were having inexplicable symptoms of unwellness, including some sort of... phantom-hypothermia, I began my own investigation. Sir Vicrul and his Force using ilk kept saying something about the ‘Void’ in this place, so I could only deduce that was the cause and that children were Force... applicable?”

“Force sensitive,” Rey corrected.

“That’s it! Thank you! It was how I realized that this place was more or less killing them. I tried to convince Vicrul to get them off world when you three showed up.”

“You said that your research was extensive,” Aliana noted. “That you had made progress with something. What was it?”

“Well that, actually, is a very interesting story,” Doctor Nymir said, a bit of academic enthusiasm slipping through the fear for her life. “My research noted that the effects of the Void worsened on those children who were in any way isolated. For children that remained in groups, the effects were still there, but somehow... nullified. It took a few trials for me to realize that the children were protecting each other. Subconsciously trying to stave off the effects of their conditions.”

“So you kept one of them apart?” Aliana asked, narrowing her eyes at the Doctor. “We found a little girl alone a few levels up. She killed a Stormtrooper with the Force.”

Doctor Nymir winced at that, the fear seeping back into her disposition. “Ah, yes... SL-2019,” she said remorsefully. “Well, I-I never kept the children isolated for long periods of time. Always in short intervals before reintroducing them back into the groups and no more after I confirmed my hypothesis. 2019, however... that incident occurred as we were relocating the children underground. Vicrul didn’t want to waste resources trying to secure her so he ordered she be left behind. He hadn’t intended for any of the children to leave her alive, anyway.”

“He was going to kill them all to make us easier to break,” Aliana concluded for her. “So his mind-altering turrets would be more effective. Yeah I caught that part of your conversation.”

She squeezed her lightsaber tighter as she glanced at Rey, who was practically seething. Everything she heard had upset her just as much as it had her wife. Knowing that not only were these kids being tortured, but they were going to be slaughtered so that Vicrul could have a shot at turning them into mindless drones? That was too much.

“It’s up to you,” she said, putting a hand on Rey’s shoulder. “Do we kill her or bring her back to the base for further questioning?”

Rey narrowed his eyes on Nymir, who was sweating hard under her scrutinizing gaze. A gaze that was beginning to burn yellow.

“...Are there medical supplies down here?” Rey asked, her voice carrying a threatening edge to it.

“Y-Yes!” Nymir said, her voice cracking under the stress. “In the sickbay! Plentiful and easy to transport!”

“We’re going to grab as much of it as we can before we leave,” Rey said, closing the distance between her and the doctor while her gaze remained fiery and threatening. “And *you* are going to treat every single one of those kids from here to Odessen. Then you will answer every single question we ask you afterwards. Then, and *only* then, will we decide if your life is worth saving.”

Nymir’s eyes widened considerably and she nodded. “Y-Yes, my Lord,” she said shakily. “I’ll make sure those kids are h-healthy.” She glanced at Aliana, in an almost pleading way.

“What are you looking at me for? You heard the Sith,” Aliana smirked.

“R-Right!” Nymir squeaked before turning on her heel and heading down another corridor. “This way to the sick bay!”

Rey and Aliana followed after her. After a moment or silently boring her gaze into the back of the doctor's skull, she quirked a quizzical brow at Aliana. "How long have you been waiting to call me a Sith to someone else?"

"Too long. She called you 'my Lord' I had to," Aliana chuckled as she hooked her arm into Rey's before leaning in and whispering in her ear, "*My Lord*."

Rey shuddered audibly at that, a borderline euphoric expression growing on her features. Aliana was left imagining what kind of reaction she would have when not encumbered by the burden of the Void.

"Oh I'm going to have fun with that," Aliana giggled as she ran a finger under Rey's chin. "Almost as much fun as knowing you think Finn's cute."

"What do you mean 'think' he's cute?" Rey asked. "That's an objective fact!"

"Really? I never thought you'd go for that," Aliana shrugged.

"Have you not felt his hugs?" Rey asked.

"Um, milords?" Nymir interjected, gesturing to the door in front of her. "We've reached the sick bay."

"Yeah yeah, just get everything hauled," Aliana said, waving a hand at her. "Anyway, yeah I've felt his hugs. But I've also felt YOUR hugs and honestly yours are a lot better."

The doctor appeared utterly baffled at how these two could carry such a mundane conversation, however chose to leave them to it and hurried into the room to gather the supplies.

"Well, yeah, duh!" Rey said with exasperation. "Yours are better too! I'm just saying between our male friends, I think Finn's the better choice. I mean, why Poe?"

"He's got that roguish charm to him," Aliana shrugged. "Besides, considering how he talks about his previous relationships you know you're going to be walking funny the next morning."

Rey's expression became pensive. "You think he's ever made Finn walk funny? I don't remember an instance of that."

Aliana opened her mouth to respond when a chime came from her holocom. With the levity of their conversation suddenly forgotten, she fetched it off her belt and answered it, recognizing the frequency to be Rose.

"Rose? Is everything okay?" Aliana asked, perturbed by the noise she heard in response. "Is that... blaster fire."

"Just a bit!" Rose called out. "I have the kids, but a platoon of troopers has us pinned. Little help!?"

"Okay, we'll settle this argument later," Aliana nodded as she drew her lightsaber. "You stay with the doc, I'm gonna go help Rose."

"Okay," Rey nodded, placing a hand on Aliana's shoulder. "I'll try to keep you shielded from here as best as I can."

“Thanks love!” Aliana exclaimed as she dashed off back up to the vault.

Nymir set a stack of medical supplies just outside the medbay and glanced after Aliana. “Are you two...?” she asked, turning her gaze toward Rey.

“We are, actually,” Rey said, devoting the focus that would have otherwise gone to being snippy at the doctor to keeping Rey shielded. “She’s the best thing to ever happen to me.”

Nymir was awkwardly silent as she looked at the utterly wistful expression on her face. “...Well, alright then,” she said. “I just need to get another stack of supplies and we should be good to go.”

Rey nodded and made a noncommittal noise, not even watching the doctor duck back into the sick bay. Her attention was growing further away as Aliana ran down the corridor and out of sight. Her focus was almost exclusively on keeping her shielded from the abyss that threatened to swallow them whole.

So much so that she almost didn’t notice the sudden, familiar chill she felt crawl along her skin. A chill that was indicative of something very *very* unfortunate.

A presence.

“How sweet,” Kylo Ren said tauntingly, prompting Rey to whip around to look incredulously at him. For the first time in over a year, she saw him clear as day before her, clad in his usual dark cloak and robes. He even donned that very same helmet she first saw him in. He was communing with her through the bond again.

The most notable difference, however, was that before seeing him before her like this filled her with terror and despair. Now, it filled her with rage and contempt.

“What are you doing here, grease bag?” Rey sneered. She was tempted to strangle him through their bond if she hadn’t been focused on keeping Aliana shielded.

“We lost contact with our outpost on Nathema,” Kylo responded, beginning to pace in front of Rey. “I take it that was your doing?”

“Alie played your Knight like a cheap bird whistle,” Rey shot back snidely. “And if you keep talking to me, I promise you that you’re next.”

“I doubt it,” Kylo Ren said plainly, his mumbled words sounding near indiscernible through the filter of his mask. “You’re burdened by the Void around you, all while trying to safeguard your precious Sith. You do not have the power to destroy me from where you are.”

Rey sneered. “It figures you’d only have the nerve to face me when you have such an advantage.”

“It’s curious,” he mused. “What would happen if we came to blows here? Would you drop your shield over the Sith to protect yourself? Or would you be the second woman I’ve seen die to protect her?”

Rey bristled at the remark about Aliana’s mother. “Quiet! You don’t get the right to speak about her mother like that you filthy coward!” Dammit, the brat had actually managed to get under her skin.

“You’re right. Talk is cheap,” Kylo said, suddenly igniting his lightsaber. “Let’s put it to the test.”

Rey's saberstaff activated just in time to catch his sudden lunge at her, parrying the swift thrust forward to shunt harmlessly to the side. To the limey bastard's credit, he didn't waste time or unnecessary energy to press his counter attack.

Doctor Nymir ran back out of the sick bay, drawn out by the sound of a swinging lightsaber and battle grunts. "What's going o-" Her brow furrowed when she saw Rey swinging and clashing her blade... at nothing. "What... what's going on!? Milord!?"

"Shut up!" Rey called out before catching Ren's assault in a blade lock.

How the hell was this bastard in a fight with her from so far away, she wondered. Was the bond really growing that strong that insane garbage like this could happen? What was happening to her mind?! What was-

As she parried another strike, the hilt that Kylo Ren held in his hand finally caught her attention. It was *her* lightsaber. The one Aliana had made for her. The one she lost on Crait!

"That's mine!" she snarled, flourishing her fiery blade back for a decisive thrust to his abdomen...

Only for her attack to be halted inches away by a clutch grip.

The free hand that Kylo used to catch her blade through the Force suddenly sent forth a volley of power, causing Rey to skid backwards across the stone floor.

She remained on her feet, appearing more enraged than unbalanced by his telekinetic assault.

"You cannot afford to hold back against me now," Kylo said. "Not while I'm the one with power to spare."

"You're still a brat with no training," Rey growled as she locked blades with him again. She spun her lightsaber in a rotating flurry, but each attack was parried. Rey cocked an eyebrow as she recognized the fluid parries of Makashi. He *had* been training. "Okay fine, entry level training."

"I suppose I should thank you," he said condescendingly as he pushed forward, relying on swift and light strikes to keep Rey from retaking the offensive. "Your rising power made me realize the error of my previous approach. The Dark Side offers infinite power, but that power must be tempered with discipline. If you hadn't refused to kill me in your arrogance, I might not have learned this lesson."

"Well then that means killing you will be all the sweeter," Rey snarled as she launched into another flurry of acrobatic strikes.

"Who are you talking to!?" Nymir demanded, appearing utterly lost at the sight before her. It wasn't until she heard the sound of approaching footsteps that she looked away from the bizarre performance. Sure enough, Aliana and Rose returned with all the children from the holding cells in tow.

"Rey!" Aliana called out. "We have the kids! Let's get the medical supplies and... what is going on?"

"I don't know!" Nymir exclaimed. "She just started shouting at open air and doing this!"

Rose turned a concerned look to Aliana. "Do you think the Void is getting to her?"

“No that can’t be it,” Aliana shook her head, looking at the sight of Rey seemingly fighting with nothing in confusion. It only took a few moments to realize that Kylo Ren had to have been there. Her eyes widened as she rushed forward, noticing that Rey had gained the upper hand and was about to run her lightsaber through empty air.

She lunged forward and grabbed her by the shoulders, wrenching her back. “Rey, stop! If you kill him now you’ll do irreparable harm to yourself!”

Rey looked back at Aliana, confusion etched in her features. “What are you talking about?”

“She’s right,” Kylo Ren said tauntingly. “This has proven it. You and I are indivisible now.”

“Alie, what are you talking about?” Rey asked.

Now that she was touching her, Aliana could feel Kylo Ren’s presence through her. She wrapped her arms around Rey and cloaked them both in the Dark Side of the Force and felt his presence vanish like smoke blown away in the breeze. “Something’s happened. Something that’s just made this war a lot more difficult.”

Your Republic Was Built on the Back of a Sith Lord

“The bond between you and Kylo Ren isn’t just an ordinary force bond,” Aliana explained as she and Rey sat at the table in Resistance High Command with Poe, Finn and Leia. “It’s a lot deeper and more powerful than that. I didn’t think it was real at first, but as the months have gone on there isn’t really any other conclusion to draw.”

Aliana had brought Rey home to discuss her condition with the others. For months she’d been watching Rey’s progress and trying to figure out not only the now unblockable bond, but the sheer overwhelming surge of power that had been coursing through Rey lately. With Kylo Ren having appeared in the deepest part of Nathema’s void, her worst fears had been realized.

“Well what is it, Alie? Tell me,” Rey pleaded, squeezing her hand.

“...You’re a Dyad in the Force,” Aliana explained.

“What’s a Dyad?” Rose asked.

“It’s a ghoulish link between two people on their most primal, subconscious level,” Aliana explained. “The Force has stitched your very spirits into one. It’s why there’s been such an intense feedback loop in your powers, and why he could speed through the Void to torment you.”

Poe pinched the bridge of his nose as he struggled to comprehend this. “...Okay, but why does this bond even exist?” he asked. “And how can it have gotten this... deep?”

“As I’ve said before, the Force wants to bind Rey and Kylo together,” Aliana explained. “The more we’ve done to resist it, the more aggressively the Force tries to retaliate. Now it’s become the thing of legends.”

“...How ‘Legendary’ are we talking?” Finn asked nervously.

“There is only one other instance of it in known galactic history. Between Darth Revan and Jedi Master Bastila Shan,” Aliana explained with a disturbed expression on her face.

There was a tense silence throughout the room. Most of them knew about Revan and Shan. They were legendary, even by the standards of the new Republic. And the knowledge that the Force was trying to repeat what happened between them was *extremely* disturbing to everyone.

“Okay, so why can’t I kill him?” Rey asked with a groan, burying her face in her hands.

“If you kill him before this bond is cut, you could rip out pieces of yourself in the process,” Aliana warned, laying a hand on Rey’s shoulder. “As much as I want the bastard dead, I don’t want to see you in chronic pain afterward.”

Rey didn’t look back up at Aliana, but she could feel the distress on her wife’s face. It was a distress she had matched quite nicely. “...But the bond *can* be cut, right?”

Aliana’s face fell at that question. She’d been doing all the research she could, but she had yet to come up with a definitive answer. All she had were theories that she wasn’t certain she could get

results from. “I... well that’s the thing, Rey,” she said. She laid her hands on Rey’s shoulders, looking apologetic. “...I don’t actually know.”

Rey’s heart suddenly leadened in her chest as she met Aliana’s gaze. Her eyes stung with unshed tears that threatened to fall in her distraught state.

“Rey I’m sorry,” Aliana whispered as she pulled the Jedi into a hug. “I’m trying everything I can think of, but I just don’t have any results. All I have is a flimsy lead...”

“Alie, please,” Rey begged softly into the crook of Aliana’s neck. “I will take any flimsy lead you have. I’ll do anything to get him out of my head.”

“Alright... I could theoretically go into your subconscious like I did with the bond, only deeper, and pull your souls apart,” Aliana explained. “But the thing is... it’s not an easy thing to do. It would only work if your soul, the core of your very being, actually lets me pull it away.”

“I don’t see why it wouldn’t,” Rey said. “I could never deny you.”

“Well, let’s not forget, Rey. Aliana is talking about your subconscious,” Rose said. “Our own minds can be fickle things. Especially when they’re being affected by outside influences.”

Rey turned to give Rose a very weary deadpan glare. “Rose, please do not insinuate I subconsciously want this Force Dyad,” she grumbled. “I get enough of that garbage from Kylo as it is.”

Rey turned her gaze back to Aliana to see she looked visibly uncomfortable and was avoiding meeting her eyes. She gently lifted her chin to look at her, her brow furrowed. “Alie? Honey? What’s wrong?”

Aliana looked both scared and ashamed. She glanced away from her, but reached up to touch her hand all the same. “I... I’m not entirely sure if it’ll work...” she confessed.

Rey’s brow furrowed, the vulnerability in Aliana’s eyes suddenly making her quite aware of their surroundings. All too swiftly, she felt congested under the gaze of their friends. Rey certainly could handle coming undone around them, but she knew Alie did not so openly wear her heart on her sleeve. “...I think my wife and I need to discuss this alone,” she said, helping Aliana to her feet.

“Rey, this affects the entire war,” Leia argued. “I think we should be here to hear this.”

“We will share the consensus we come to once we’ve had some time to recuperate,” Rey assured Leia sternly. “At the moment, however, we need a level of privacy to discuss the personal element to this problem.”

She didn’t wait for a response, and simply pulled Aliana out the door by the shoulders. Aliana, for her part, was quiet as a temple mouse. The two of them quietly moved through the base toward the Fury, not a word passing between them. There didn’t need to be. They both knew the gravity of what was at stake, and neither of them liked it. Actions would have to suffice. Rey gently ran her hand up and down Aliana’s back as they walked. A small gesture of affection intended to help take the edge off. Lord knows they both needed what small comforts they could get. How interesting it was that suddenly her own problems suddenly seemed a little further away while she was fretting over Aliana’s distress.

“You don’t need to soothe me,” Aliana said quietly. She nonetheless leaned against her wife’s shoulder, however, and wrapped an arm around her waist. “You’re the one with the Force meddling in your life. Not me.”

“What if I *do* need to soothe you,” Rey whispered, her lips brushing over the top of Aliana’s head. “What if fretting over you is what’s keeping me from worrying about this infernal dyad?”

Aliana huffed sarcastically and squeezed Rey’s waist tighter. “Less than a week of marriage and we’re already codependent.”

“I’ll take codependency with you over whatever the Force has planned for me,” Rey murmured softly.

Soon enough, the two of them were back on the Fury and within the safety of their quarters. They sat next to each other on the foot of the bed as the silence fell over them again. Porgracing was sprawled over their laps, looking up at the both of them with concern in his large eyes. He could sense the distress they were both feeling, even if he could never truly understand it. His little chirps and mewls did help keep the tension from becoming unbearable, though it did not dispel it completely.

Rey’s took Aliana’s hand in her own, her grip a little too tight to be comfortable. “...Alie?”

“I’m sorry,” Aliana sighed, leaning against her and squeezing her hand back. “I just... I’m not sure if I can coax your soul away from his. I... I don’t know if you’re going to respond positively to me on that kind of level...”

“Hey,” Rey said quietly, lifting her free hand to stroke Aliana’s cheek and tilt her gaze up to look at her. “Don’t think like that, on some level deep down, I secretly despise you. Don’t even humor the thought that your soul isn’t the mate of my own.” Emphatically, she lifted Alie’s hand and held it firmly against her own heart. “If it’s a matter of my essence responding positively to you, I have no doubt that it will work. Never, not even at my angriest, have I ever hated you.”

Aliana looked up at her. Her brow was furrowed and she looked at her with the most pleading, vulnerable look in her eyes. “...Really?”

“Really,” Rey said confidently before planting the most tender of kisses onto Aliana’s forehead. “You are the single most important woman in my life and I would not give you up for anything. The Force itself will not tear us apart, no matter what it tries. I have no doubt that this will work.” It was then that Rey’s face fell slightly. “...But if, for whatever reason, it doesn’t, I need you to promise me something.”

Aliana felt a coiling tension deep within her, but gestured for Rey to go on.

“If you cannot sever the bond between me and Kylo cleanly and harmlessly...” Rey swallowed the wedge in her throat, forcing herself to complete the sentence. “...I need you to promise me you will just kill him, or let me kill him.” She continued to speak before Aliana could get in her knee jerk refusal. “I know you said a part of me would likely die with him. I know you said it would cause me great pain for the rest of my life. But I will gladly take it if it means getting rid of him. Nothing would be worse than to remain tied to him and no amount of pain wouldn’t be worth a future with you.”

Aliana bristled at the idea of her wife being in chronic pain for the rest of her life if she couldn't do this. If she couldn't cut this damn thing. Even if Rey did respond positively to her on her most primal, subconscious level, that didn't mean the Force would be as willing to play nice. "I... I promise. If I can't cut it... I'll just kill him and damn the consequences. But I... I can't try to cut the bond now. I'm not... centered. And... if I use you as a vector, it'll hurt."

"I understand," Rey nodded before pulling Aliana into a hug. One of the most emotionally charged hugs she had ever given her, which was saying a lot. "Thank you," she whispered.

Aliana squeezed Rey with all her might, burying her face into her wife's neck. This was largely her wife's problem, and she was the one suffering. But the pressure was on her to cut this damn bond. And there was more at stake than just the continued harassment from a delusional Jedi. More dire emotional damage that could be done if this didn't go off without a hitch.

"I don't want to lose you the way I lost my mother," she whispered as she squeezed her even tighter.

"You won't," Rey crooned, deftly threading her fingers through Aliana's curls. "I won't let that happen. I'll claw out of the jaws of death before I let the Force keep me from you."

Aliana's eyes stung and she sharply inhaled, trying to hide further into Rey's neck. "I'm sorry I'm so paranoid," she whispered as she melted into Rey's embrace. "You're the one with the stalker in your head."

"It's okay, Alie," Rey said soothingly. "Trust me. I am plenty scared on my own. But this?" She squeezed Aliana's waist. "This is worth it. This is what is keeping me the fear at bay. Because, no matter what, they will not take this away. Never. I trust in this. I trust in *us*. More than I ever have trusted in the Force."

Aliana pulled away slightly and looked at Rey with a pleading, loving glint in her eyes. She was on the verge of tears, and Rey's determined reassurances were doing wonders to calm her nerves. "...I love you, Rey. I love you so much. You're the one thing in the galaxy I can't live without."

Aliana's words shattered Rey's heart and forged it anew from the shards. She could not remember the last time she felt such a fervent and passionate protective urge over Aliana. The closest she could recall was aboard the Supremacy, but that was more born of panic and desperation. This was born from an almost serene certainty that she would move planets and extinguish stars to keep this woman safe; and she knew that Aliana would do the same.

"I love you too, Alie," Rey whispered, pulling her wife into a sensual kiss.

Aliana sighed and clutched her wife as if afraid she would float away, and returned the kiss. It was soft. Gentle. Aliana could practically feel the sincere and heartfelt affection radiating from the Jedi as she melted into her arms. Fresh tears slid down the Sith's cheeks, but this time they were tears of happiness. No matter what the Force threw at her, she knew she would always have this. The warmth and comfort of this woman who had come to mean more to her than anything. Who had become the brightest star in the sky.

Who had become home.

"Excuse me, Miss Alie? Miss Rey?"

Rey and Aliana looked towards the closed door when they heard 2V speak up from behind it.

“I do not mean to intrude, but one of those children from Nathama are at the airlock. I think they are looking for you.”

Aliana raised an eyebrow. “Really? Uh... alright, let them in,” she said, pulling away from Rey and standing up. She grabbed a fistful of her cloak and wiped her eyes. “Did they say what they wanted?”

“They simply said they were looking for ‘the nice ladies’,” 2V responded. “I shall let them in.”

Rey arched a brow curiously as she rose to her feet alongside Aliana. “Which child do you think it is?”

“Maybe the one who was alone?” Aliana asked. “Not sure why Holdo’s letting a small child wander the base though.”

“With how many kids we’ve already freed from training camps, I can imagine one of them might slip through the cracks of her watch,” Rey rationalized while she made her way to the door. “So long as we keep an eye on this one, I think it will be okay.”

Aliana and Rey opened the airlock, and were correct in their assumption. The little girl from the Sanitarium’s upper levels was standing outside the door, looking shyly up at them and rocking back and forth on her feet.

“Hello?” Aliana asked.

“H-Hello,” the child said back somewhat nervously, continually rocking back and forth and keeping her eyes to the floor.

“Do you need help with something?” Rey asked.

“No,” the girl shook her head. “I just wanted to tell you that I’m not cold no more.”

Aliana smiled softly and knelt down on the platform. “That’s because this planet has a lot of energy around it,” she explained. “It’s not like the last one.”

Though her head was still lowered timidly, Aliana could make out a smile on the girl’s cheeks. “I like this planet,” she said, a definite cheeriness in her voice that wasn’t there before. “I like you too.”

“Aww, thanks! I like you too!” Aliana smiled, reaching out and ruffling the girl’s hair. “The grown ups here being nice to you?”

“Yuh-huh,” the girl nodded. “The tall one gave us all food. She was really nice.”

“That’s good to hear! I was afraid I was gonna have to go clock an old Jedi across the head,” Aliana chuckled. “If the General gives you any trouble, just come find me. I’ll set her straight.”

“Yes, ma’am,” the girl said with a nod. “Thank you for saving us from the cold.”

“You are most welcome,” Rey said with a smile.

The girl waddled forward and gave Aliana a hug before turning around and descending the ramp again to go find the other kids. Aliana was practically beaming as she looked up at Rey. "She gave me a hug!" she said quietly, standing up and hooking her arm with Rey's.

"She did," Rey said with an infectious smile. "It was perhaps the most adorable thing I've ever seen."

It truly was. Seeing Aliana being so gentle and sweet with the children they liberated as of late was always a delight to see. Even by those metrics, seeing her with that child, who Doctor Nymir called SL-2019, was especially precious. It brought a warmth to her heart that was just a little bit different from anything she had ever felt, but was very much welcome.

"...Is that something you ever thought about?" Rey asked, prompting Aliana to give her a curious look. "Children, I mean."

"Huh?" Aliana's eyes widened. Then, almost suspiciously, she looked away and rubbed the back of her neck nervously. "Uh... I dunno... maybe, maybe not?"

Rey furrowed her brow, curiosity and concern rising in her expression. "Alie?" she pressed gently.

Aliana kept her back to Rey and wrung her hands. "Uh... yeah, kinda?" she said nervously. "I mean... I guess I always saw it as a given that I'd have a daughter one way or another. Another Sith for the family?"

"Admittedly, it's not something I gave much thought to in my life," Rey shrugged before giving Aliana a fond smile. "Never thought I would get that far. Even so, I wouldn't mind that kind of future... with you."

Aliana turned back and smiled softly. "And... you'd be fine with raising them as Sith?" she asked quietly.

Rey nodded. "So long as that's what they would want as well," she said. "I'd rather not be like Leia and force them to choose a path."

Aliana smiled and turned back fully to take Rey's hand. "Thanks Rey," she whispered as she pulled her wife closer. "My family is very important to me. I'm glad you're a part of it."

"I'm glad you made me a part of it," Rey sighed contentedly, resting her cheek against the top of Aliana's head. "You're honestly the best thing to happen to me, Alie."

"And you're the best thing to happen to me," Aliana whispered as she squeezed her wife's waist. "I *will* break this dyad. I promise."

"I know you will," Rey cooed as she met Aliana's assuring grip with her own. "I have faith in you, love."

Aliana and Rey arrived in the makeshift conference room later that evening at the request of Leia. The summons didn't come with an explanation, but Leia had said it was urgent. As they arrived, they immediately saw why. A delegate from the Republic was sitting in one of the chairs arranged in a circle, reminiscent of the old Jedi Council chambers on Coruscant, with five Senators including

Senator Marek. Leia, Poe, Ackbar, Amilyn and Rose were there as well. As they arrived, Talon ran in behind them looking out of breath.

"I got the summons," she breathed, doubling over. "Just as I landed too."

"So did we," Aliana nodded. "What's going on?"

Leia only sighed and gestured to the Senators. "Introduce yourself."

The delegate stood up and nodded to the three. "I am Mon Mothma. First Chancellor of the New Republic and advisor to Chancellor Villecham."

"Mothma... you led the old Rebel Alliance, didn't you?" Aliana asked, stepping forward and shaking her hand. "My mother spoke highly of you."

Mothma pursed her lips. "For the sake of what we hope to accomplish here I choose to take that as a compliment," she said evenly before gesturing to the older man on her left. "Master Jedi, I trust you remember Senator Marek."

"I do," Rey said, inclining her head to him. "Senator."

Marek nodded in kind. "Mrs. Beniko," he said with a wry grin teasing his mouth before her turned to look at Aliana. "So you are the Darth Amorosa I've heard so much about?" He narrowed his eyes at her, looking at her more through the Force than with his physical gaze. "...Not entirely what I expected, I shall admit."

"You must be Lord Starkiller," Aliana nodded in acknowledgment. "My mother spoke highly of you as well. Said your saber techniques were above that of any Sith she'd encountered before."

The smirk on his lips widened with a surge of pride. "Those were the days," he said before casting his gaze down to one of his hands. "Before those pesky fractures."

Mothma turned her gaze to Talon. "And who is this?"

"This is Lord Talon," Aliana said, gesturing for Talon to step forward. "One of my apprentices. She's been leading my fleet to recover the children the First Order has been holding captive."

Mothma furrowed her brow. "... *One of* your apprentices?" she asked.

"Yeah, we don't really do the whole 'Rule of Two' thing, your Chancellorship," Talon said with a shrug. "There's really no need for it. Amorosa's the one calling the shots and we respect that."

Mothma's face, lined with age and stress over the decades became pensive and slightly concerned. "...I see."

"I've also trained Master Beniko and Finn," Aliana explained. "As the only one with enough mastery in the Force, it's fallen to me to educate the Force Sensitives in our ranks. Talon is Sith, Rey is a Jedi and Finn is... actually I'm not sure what to call Finn. He's doing his own sharpshooter thing."

"So you continue to follow the Jedi path despite being instructed by a Sith, Master Beniko?" Mothma asked Rey.

“A version of it,” Rey clarified, her tone firm and resolute as she met the Chancellor’s eyes. “I like to think there is still a place for the Jedi in the galaxy, but much has to change before we can consider the construction of any Order. Trying to remake it exactly as it was in the Old Republic is what caused it to collapse... again.”

“As Rey is the last living Jedi, she is the one who gets to determine what the Jedi path will be,” Aliana said, reaching out and touching Rey’s shoulder.

“I was speaking to her, Sith,” Mon Mothma said tersely.

Aliana blinked with surprise at the Chancellors sudden sharpness before she suddenly felt heavier with weariness. *‘Ah,’* she realized internally. *‘It’s going to be one of those conversations.’*

“With all due respect, Advisor,” Rey responded, her voice suddenly bearing a definite edge. “Talking to my wife like that will not endear you to me.”

The room fell quiet enough that a pin could be heard dropping on the other end of Odessen. “...Your wife?” Mon Mothma said with an air of surprise. “...You didn’t mention that part, Leia.”

“It was a recent change,” Leia said with a sigh. “The two have been lovers for almost a year.”

Marek glanced at Rey and winked, silently conveying that he hadn’t shared the news with the Republic about Rey and Aliana’s relationship.

“That... may complicate things,” Mothma said.

“How so?” Aliana asked with an arched brow.

The old woman exhaled slowly through her nostrils before looking at her with renewed composure. “The purpose of this meeting was to follow up on the agreements regarding your pardon and our continued support of the Resistance,” Mothma began to explain. “The recent unveiling of your ‘Sith Fleet’ has given the Republic cause for concern, but we were willing to approach you to discuss the matter... civilly.”

Aliana rolled her eyes and took a seat, gesturing for Mothma and the others to do the same. Rey sat on one side of her while Talon sat on the other. “What exactly is the problem?”

“A fleet of Sith-aligned ships operating under the Resistance’s banner should be obvious,” Mothma frowned.

“Well considering there’s a war going on against a crazed Jedi and his cult of Vader worshippers, it sadly isn’t,” Aliana frowned.

“The presence and documented capacity of your fleet makes the Republic concerned about what exactly will happen once the First Order is dealt with,” one senator explained. “The Sith history prosper in conquest and the spoils of war your forces stand to gain at the end of this could be considerable. The Senate is worried what exactly will stop you or anyone under your command from declaring war with the Republic once this one is over.”

“Well I suppose what will stop me and anyone under my command is a distinct lack of aggression from the Republic,” Aliana said with a dismissive shrug. “There... will be a lack of aggression

from the Republic, won't there?" She spoke in an almost taunting tone. As if daring Mothma to answer otherwise.

The Advisor was silent for a moment, Aliana seeing the gears work behind her eyes as she considered her next words carefully. "The Republic does not believe in picking fights," she answered through a clenched jaw. "Nor does it believe in subscribing to paranoia. However, there is the history of the Sith to consider. Historically, they have always been an enemy to the Republic. Either trying to destroy us through brute force or by way of subterfuge as Sidious had done. The Senate at large might not be convinced that the existence of a Sith Order is not, itself, an act of provocation."

"I will say to you what I said to the General, Advisor," Aliana said, scowling slightly. "I have no interest in declaring war on the Republic when this is over. But if the Republic should see fit to come after me in violence, or those under my command, then there won't be a Corellian hell far enough to hide you from me."

A cold air washed over the room, causing the senators present, save for Marek, to shift uncomfortably.

"...Which leaves the possibility of subterfuge," Mothma said, taking but a moment to steel herself again. "Darth Sidious posed as an ally to the Republic for decades before dismantling it completely and replacing it with an Empire built on Sith ideals. A Sith that can conquer the galaxy by way of conversion and corruption over abject bloodshed is the freshest in the minds of the Republic. Some senators believe you might be that sort of Sith." Her eyes turned to Rey. "And seeing the effect you've had on the last Jedi in the galaxy, I begin to wonder if those worries may not be unfounded."

"I won't apologize to the Republic for falling in love with Rey, Advisor," Aliana scowled. "And I won't apologize for my very existence. If you want to lead yourself down a self-destructive path of paranoia, then so be it. Know that you'll die a weaker Sith than most."

The room was uncomfortably quiet again. Rey watched carefully at the other senators who appeared uncertain as to what to say or do next. Nervous ticks from finger tapping to lip twitching were aplenty among them. The only exception to this display of anxiety was Marek, who appeared as calm and collected as she'd ever seen him. A part of her couldn't help but wonder what it was about this situation that allowed him to be so reserved. It was possible that he believed Aliana at her word that she was not interested in conquest, but did that also mean he trusted his fellow senators not to act stupid and try attacking first? Surely he didn't want that, did he?

"Perhaps," Mothma said, breaking the silence, "All the Republic needs is a sign of good faith from your new Order."

"A sign of good faith?" Aliana inquired, making a show of looking contemplative for a moment before a smug grin formed on her lips. "Well... there was that time I single handedly saved the Hosnian system from exploding. I'd say that'll do it for you."

"Amorosa this isn't-"

"No. Stop," Aliana frowned, standing up and glaring at Mothma. "You will demand nothing from me. Your Republic and your Jedi Order tried to kill me when I was a girl, and now you ask me to jump through hoops to prove I'm not hostile? I demand you prove that *you* are not hostile to *me*. Contrary to what you might think, the Republic does not rule the galaxy. It never has. Even now

you bend over backwards to appease the loathsome Hutt cartels while they exploit the people of the Outer Rim for profit. The Confederacy you waged Galactic war to stamp out is still out there. You aren't the dominant authority in this galaxy and I won't appease you. You're nothing more than a Krayt Dragon in Bantha's clothes."

Rey could feel the surge of outrage from the collective Senate, though none of them saw fit to voice it. The uncertainty and fear that they felt was too dense for their indignant pride to cut through.

Surprisingly, the first one to say anything after that was Marek.

"I have been studying Lord Amorosa carefully while we were conversing," he said, sitting forward in his seat. "And I believe her when she says she isn't interested in war."

Mothma's brow furrowed. "You... *believe* her? Just like that?"

"I am quite familiar with the Light and Dark Side of the Force, Advisor," Marek continued. "I know how it can shape a person. Of the Dark Side users I've met, Lord Amorosa seems the most remarkably... stable. Nothing about her presence is like that of Vader or Sidious. Given that and everything about her we have on record, I am satisfied."

Aliana looked genuinely surprised, and smiled at Marek. "Thank you, Lord Starkiller," she said quietly as she bowed her head.

A wry chuckle rumbled in the man's throat. "Flattering, but you needn't address me as such Lord Amorosa," he said. "That title was lost to me a lifetime ago."

"And it is not suitable for that of a Senator," Mothma said sternly, before her thoughts turned introspective for a moment. "...Is there anyone else that wishes to vouch for Lord Amorosa's claims?"

The other senators remained quiet.

"I would," Amilyn said, stepping forward from where she was quietly observing. "And I like to believe that Admiral Tico and Commander Dameron do as well."

"Yes we do," Rose nodded.

"Absolutely," Poe supplied.

"Thanks you three," Aliana smiled as she looked back to Marek. "And for the record, as Dark Lady of the Sith I will recognize any title I please. Even the last of the Jedi has graciously accepted a title from me."

The color drained from Mothma's face as she looked at Rey in growing horror. "You *what?* "

Rey shrugged casually. "It was a wedding present," she remarked.

"Her title is Darth Irus. And she will always be recognized as such among the Sith," Aliana said with a look of pride.

The horror reached its zenith on Mothma's face. "...You... you're not even an actual Jedi are you?"

“I am,” Rey insisted, her composure and resolve never wavering, “Because I am the last of the Jedi. On that basis, I decide what does and does not make a Jedi. It is as I told you, advisor, any Jedi Order that is remade after this war will not be the one you are familiar with.”

“So we have a Jedi trained by a Sith and with a Sith title. No promise of the Jedi order’s return. And a fleet that has very unkind opinions of the Republic,” Mothma scowled, turning to Marek. “And you believe her when she says she isn’t interested in war?!”

“Senator, if you believed every person who dislikes the Republic is an enemy waiting to happen, you’re going to be fighting half the Senate,” Marek chuckled. “The Republic is a democracy. Amorosa is allowed to have her opinions on how we’ve run it.”

“Democracy is not intended to give a voice to the wicked, Marek!” Mothma countered. “A Sith abused our ways to attain power. What is to stop this one from doing the same the moment we lower our guard?”

“Darth Sidious hid in the shadows and pretended to respect our ways,” Marek countered. “He didn’t run for Chancellor on a campaign of ‘Hi, I’m a Sith Lord.’”

Rey couldn’t suppress a chuckle at that, much to the distress of Mothma and the other senators.

“Look, Mothma,” Marek continued. “I know how Sith operate and I do not believe that Amorosa means to cause us trouble. We can debate that opinion here or back at Coruscant, but I will continue to fight you on your suspicions.”

Mothma scowled and turned her gaze back to Aliana. “And what happened to Luke Skywalker?”

“He’s dead,” Aliana shrugged.

Mothma’s expression darkened. “How?”

Rey’s brow furrowed, something flickering over her face before she interjected. “He died in exile on Ach To,” Rey explained. “I felt it after I had completed my training and we rejoined with the Resistance.”

“The last remnant of the Republic’s Jedi Order currently leads the First Order,” Aliana said, sitting back and crossing her legs. “And he grows more powerful every day.”

A wedge pushed into Rey’s throat as the thought of Kylo Ren entered her mind. She had hoped that no one in Resistance High Command told the Senate about the Dyad. She could stomach stuffy bureaucrats believing that she was just Aliana’s puppet. What she couldn’t stomach was the thought of anyone truly believing that entitled grease stain had any power over her. She couldn’t handle anyone even thinking that.

“We can sit here and debate all day, Advisor,” Aliana frowned. “But I refuse to have such discussions with the Republic. You ally with the Hutts and profit off the suffering of others. Your own people are abused by your security forces every single day. You can barely keep your own people together as they become consumed by those who line your pockets. Your Republic is the desiccated, reanimated corpse of one of the worst moments in galactic history. You built the Republic off the back of its predecessor, which you confess was so weak that one Sith was able to overturn it.”

She stood up and headed for the door, stopping momentarily to look back at her.

“You want to challenge my decisions?” she asked. “You and what army?” And with that, she left.

Rey was the next to sit up, opening her mouth to speak but remained silent. Awkwardness and anticipation hung in the room before she finally said, “Senator Marek,” in farewell and followed after Aliana.

Mothma looked on in shock and turned to Leia. “Why haven’t you exiled her from your Resistance?” she demanded.

Leia flinched slightly, finding the older woman’s gaze difficult to meet. “...Regardless of what I may think of Amorosa... she gets results. And if I were to exile her, Rey would follow on principle. We would be without two crucial assets in our fight against the First Order.”

“Those assets could very easily turn on the Republic, Leia!” Mothma exclaimed.

“I don’t believe so,” Leia shook her head. “Amorosa simply wishes to be left alone. She hasn’t demonstrated a desire to achieve greater power. I don’t think she even believes there is a greater power. And for all our disagreements, it’s clear that she loves Rey more than anything.”

“She isn’t Sidious, Senator,” Amilyn added. “For all her accomplishments, she’s just a kid. She didn’t ask to be thrust into leadership, and she didn’t ask for most of what’s happened to her. All she wants out of this war is revenge for her mother’s murder.”

“Were she much older, or perhaps the apprentice of a greater Sith, your suspicions might have merit, Mothma,” Marek said. “But it is as Admiral Holdo says. She is just a kid, barely any older than I was when I was a pawn of Vader. I do not believe that she has any aspirations of conquest. She just wishes to *be* .”

Mothma exhaled sharply through her nostrils again, her head lowered in frustration. “And what if you’re all wrong.”

“Well then you get to say ‘I told you so,’” Marek responded with a wry grin. “We all know how much you love to do that.”

“Mothma, what if *you’re* wrong?” Amilyn asked. “What if it turns out that you’ve been vilifying a grieving kid for nothing?”

“Then at least the Republic will not fall from my mistake!” Mothma shot back. Too sharply for her words to be rooted within reason. The others around her appeared taken aback by her words, cold and cruel as they were, before some looked at her disapprovingly.

Mothma only glared at all of them as she picked up her comlink. “Admiral Taylin? Come in.”

There was a moment before the comlink crackled and a man’s voice came from the speaker. “This is Taylin.”

“Take a battalion to the surface and arrest Darth Amorosa,” she ordered. “She’s to be brought back to Coruscant to stand trial.”

“Pardon, Senator, but on what charges?” Taylin asked.

“Mothma, what are you doing?” Marek asked incredulously. “This is madness! You cannot arrest Amorosa on baseless speculation.”

“Threatening acts of violence against the Senate,” Mothma said to Taylin, utterly ignoring Marek’s protests. “The other Senators and I can confirm we witnessed Amorosa threaten to take our very lives.”

“If we attacked her unprovoked, Mothma!” Marek countered. “She threatened us on the ground that you were already considering acts of war!”

“Very well, Senator. It will be done,” Taylin said before the comlink crackled out.

“Mon!” Leia exclaimed, standing up and glaring at her. “Are you insane? You’d risk not only Amorosa’s wrath, but Rey’s as well?!”

“Mrs. Beniko has proven herself to be an enemy of the Republic as well,” Mothma said plainly as she rose from her seat. “We will suffer no accomplices to the Sith. Never again.”

“And what of the fleet in orbit?” Leia demanded. “What of the Resistance members who’ve befriended her? Would you go to war with your own people, Mon?”

The comlink crackled to life again. “Senator? We have a visual on the Sith.”

“Engage,” Mothma confirmed.

“Alright, this is ridiculous,” Poe exasperated as he stepped forward. “Admirals. Permission to detain Senator Mothma on grounds of unprovoked aggression?”

“You don’t have that authority,” Mon Mothma scowled at Poe. “You are all Republic soldiers.”

Poe and Mothma glared at each other, and there was a palpable tension in the room as everyone, Republic and Resistance alike, looked at each other with unease.

“They might be,” Talon said matter-of-factly as she drew her lightsaber. “But I’m not.”

Aliana’s ears twitched as the sound of perfectly coordinated boot steps sounded out from behind her. Turning around, both she and Rey saw Republic soldiers with their rifles drawn, heading right for them.

“Oh kriff,” Aliana rolled her eyes, drawing her lightsaber. “That’s far enough, trooper.”

The troop halted, save for one officer at the front who took a few more steps forward. Accents to his uniform suggested that he was the squadron’s commander. “Darth Amorosa,” he said evenly. “You are hereby under arrest for threatening acts of violence against members of the Senate in direct violation of your official pardon. You are hereby ordered to come with us to Coruscant and stand trial.”

“No,” Aliana said matter of factly. “Odessen is a Sith planet. I am ordering you to leave. You are trespassing. Further acts of aggression will be met with deadly force.”

The rifles primed themselves, the soldier’s preparing to open fire.

“Lord Amorosa,” the officer said warningly. “We are prepared to take you in by force if we have to.”

“No,” Rey interjected, stepping forward and lifting her hand. “You are prepared for no such thing.”

Over a dozen rifles clattered to the floor as each Republic trooper suddenly clawed desperately at their own throats.

Aliana smirked as she watched them struggle for breath. “The Jedi is powerful, troopers. More powerful than you know.”

There was another clattering of boots, this time more scattered, as Finn and Jannah ran up behind them. Rifle and Energy Bow were drawn, and all of the renegade Stormtroopers followed suit behind them.

“We heard a commotion,” Finn explained. “You two alright?”

“The Republic is trying to arrest me,” Aliana explained.

“What!?” Finn balked. “Why!?”

“Being Sith, most likely,” Rey wagered, not releasing her grip on the soldiers who continued to writhe desperately and fruitlessly for their lives.

There was another clattering, prompting most of the company to turn and look at the source. Resistance High Command had left the Conference Room, with Mon Mothma actively restrained by Talon.

“Lord Amorosa? The Senator ordered your arrest on trumped up charges,” Talon explained. “The Republic is trying to declare war.”

“Of course they are,” Aliana rolled her eyes. “Rey let the soldiers go. We’ve found the culprit.”

Rey nodded and relinquished her grip, causing all the troopers to collapse onto the floor gasping greedily for the air that was bequeathed to them.

“Unhand me, you brute!” Mothma grunted as she struggled in vain against Talon’s grasp on her.

Aliana sighed and approached Mon Mothma. “My mother thought so highly of you. It’d break her heart to see what you’re doing now.”

Mon Mothma did little more than sneer at Aliana at first. “Why should I believe a word that comes out of your mouth, Sith?”

“Do you know what my mother’s name was?” Aliana asked, raising an eyebrow to Mon Mothma.

The older woman narrowed her eyes at Aliana. A sliver of curiosity cut through the mistrust and stubbornness of her expression. “Should I have?”

“Tahleea,” Aliana said, dragging out every syllable and looking down at Mothma like she were an insect. In moments like these, playing the part of the Sith Lord was easy.

“Tahle-” Mothma’s eyes blew wide with realization. Realization and a growing sense of dread. “...N-No...” she whispered under her breath, finding herself unable to speak any louder. “No that can’t be... that isn’t... You’re lying.” Her voice, remaining barely above a whisper, lacked any and all confidence from a moment before. Aged eyes that previously held defiant determination became unfocused and lost.

Nearly everyone else simply looked around in confusion, the unspoken context being lost on them. Rey turned to Aliana, a silent question on her lips. She did not yet speak it however. The look on her wife’s face conveyed that she didn’t need everyone else to understand the connection. Not while Mothma understood perfectly and was squirming as a result. That was enough for her. The explanation could come later. Once the deed was done.

“That’s not true,” Mothma continued, her broken timbre cracking further. “...I can’t be.”

“It *is* true,” Aliana nodded. “Tahleea was Sith. Your Republic was built on the back of a Sith Lord.”

“Amorosa, what are you talking about?” Leia asked.

“Later,” Aliana said with a dismissive wave of her hand, her blood red eyes transfixed on how Mothma was practically limp in Talon’s grasp. The old woman was lax with a broken defeat, the sight of which she positively cherished. “Perhaps my mother will be able to express her disappointment to you on the other side,” she said vindictively before lifting her gaze back up to the Twi’lek. “Talon?”

Talon nodded with a near sadistic smile as she freed one hand to draw her lightsaber and ran it swiftly and cleanly through Mothma’s neck. The head fell to the floor in an undignified thump on the floor, followed by the body as Talon released her grip on it. Mon Mothma, former Senator of the Old Republic, prominent member of the Rebellion, and Former Supreme Chancellor of the New Republic, died a criminal on Odessen.

“I believe we’re done here,” Aliana said darkly as she glanced at one of the other Senators. “Recall your forces and get off my planet. So long as there are no repeats of this incident, I won’t seek further recompense.”

Marek was the one Senator who felt bold enough to step forward, offering Aliana an understanding nod. “Of course, Lord Amorosa,” he said, his face creasing slightly with disappointment. Not so much at the Sith, but rather at his now late colleague. This whole thing very nearly went well before Mothma gave into her fear. “Our sincerest apologies for the altercation.”

“I accept your apology, Lord Starkiller,” Aliana nodded. “Tell your Chancellor that any further acts of aggression will be taken as an act of war and retaliation will be swift. If the Republic wants an ear in the Sith Fleet, then they may communicate with me through you and you alone.”

“I will certainly relay that information. And I appreciate the olive branch,” Marek confirmed before looking over to the troopers that had long since recovered from their momentary strangulation. “Could you collect Mothma’s remains so that we may return them to Coruscant?”

Two of the troopers nodded and rushed down the walkway to attain a hover stretcher.

Aliana turned and left, heading for the mess hall. “Well I don’t know about you, but I’m starved. Rey? Talon?”

Both women nodded enthusiastically, the promise of disengaging from this tense altercation sounding just as promising as a good meal.

“Of course, love,” Rey said with a smile.

“After you, boss,” Talon said cheekily.

2V stepped out of the kitchen with two bowls of stew while Aliana carried out her own. The both of them made their way to the table with Rey and Talon, who awaited the meal eagerly.

“You know I could have helped with making dinner,” Rey said.

“Yes, but I always like cooking for you,” Aliana said as she sat beside her. “It’s not the same if you help.”

Rey giggled as the stew was set down in front of her. “What’s this? It looks like soup.”

“Stew. It’s like soup, but thicker and heartier,” Aliana explained, smiling at how suddenly intrigued Rey looked at the dish.

Talon was the first to dig in, letting out an unabated moan of approval as the stew met her tongue. “Oh kriff me, I forgot how good your cooking is!”

“That’s drifter talent,” Aliana giggled as she swallowed a spoonful. “I can’t fix the ship, but I can cook a good meal.”

“Are you sure you aren’t using the Force to make this food?” Rey asked between bites, smiling despite her cheeks full of delicious stew. “Because it certainly *tastes* like it.”

“The Force can’t make food taste better,” Aliana chuckled.

“I thought you said the Dark Side was a pathway to many abilities,” Rey snickered. “Surely that would extend to flavor, wouldn’t it?”

“The Force can’t conjure spices,” Aliana giggled, leaning in and kissing Rey’s cheek.

“Fair enough,” Rey said before taking another spoonful of stew. “I can accept you being a fantastic cook by way of skill. Honestly it makes you all the more amazing.”

Talon chuckled. “Kriff, it’s so weird watching you two be so domestic,” she said. “It’s like watching a bantha walk on just its forelegs. It’s amazing.”

“Talon, I’m not just some violent killer,” Aliana scoffed as she wrapped an arm around Rey. “I never have been.”

“No, but I’ve never seen you this happy before,” Talon clarified. “Before all of this, you almost always had your game face on in one way or another. And you’re my commanding officer. I feel like I’m looking past the veil onto something not meant for mortal eyes.”

Aliana giggled as she held Rey closer. “Gotta keep my personal life under wraps. Someone might go after the people I love.”

“I’ll gut anyone who tries,” Rey crooned, brushing her lips against Aliana’s temple as she coiled her free hand around her waist. “No power in the galaxy is going to tear us apart.”

“Not even the Force itself,” Aliana cooed as she snuggled under Rey’s chin. A mutual wave of assurance and adoration washed over the both of them as they nestled into each other. Their guest and their own meals nearly forgotten as they opted to instead relax in their embrace.

Talon watched the both of them rather mesmerized before a sudden chirping caused her gaze to turn down. Porgracing stood at the foot of the table, eyes wide with the smell of stew filling his nostrils.

“They like this all the time here?” she asked the porg.

Porgracing chirped in response.

Talon plucked a piece of bantha meat out of the stew and held it out to him. Porgracing took it into his mouth and set it down on the floor, taking nibbles out of it and chirping happily. “The bird’s cute. Where’d you get it?”

“Ahch To,” Rey said with a smile, squeezing Aliana closer to her as she did. “The little sweetie took to Alie almost immediately. Something I could certainly relate to.”

“Well you had to take to me twice,” Aliana giggled as she kissed Rey’s neck.

“Should I go for a third time?” Rey asked with a cheeky smirk. “I wouldn’t protest to falling in love with you all over again.”

“You two are disgusting,” Talon scoffed, though her smirk conveyed no hint of actual disdain. “Look at you! You look at each other the way this bird is looking at the stew.”

“Well in all fairness, Rey does taste phenomenal,” Aliana snickered as she ran her finger under Rey’s chin.

Her wife joined in laughter. “You are horrible!” she exclaimed.

“I’m Sith,” Aliana cooed, her hand trailing down Rey’s chest.

“You seeing this scrap, kiddo?” Talon asked, looking at the porg.

Porgracing had managed to make it to the edge of the table, his little fins clinging for dear life as his webbed feet dangled. His attention was not on the married couple or the other sith, but on the nearest bowl of steaming hot stew that carried the most delectable aroma about it.

“You just want more food,” Talon snickered as she beckoned to the droid. “2V? Get the poor thing some stew.”

“Very well, Lord Talon!” 2V nodded as he hurried back to the kitchen.

“So do the two of you ever stop?” Talon asked.

“Not if we can help it,” Aliana shrugged. “What’s the matter, Tal? Never been in love before?”

“The closest thing to love that I need is steady income and the Hutt cartel up in flames,” the Twi’lek huffed, leaning back in her seat. “Everything else I can take or leave.”

“Well I can get you one of those,” Aliana laughed.

The three of them laughed in delight as the Jedi and Sith separated from each other and started to eat their stew. Even with the war ramping up around them, it was nice to just sit back with friends and enjoy life. This, Aliana thought, was what made fighting worth it in the end.

Fantasized Scenarios About Our Actual Lives

The Senate was in an uproar. After the death of former Chancellor Mon Mothma, a large contingent of the Republic wanted to rescind Amorosa's pardon and arrest her. A smaller, but more vocal contingent didn't see the value of infighting. The Senate had been in session for thirty hours deliberating on what to be done about the increasingly rogue Resistance.

"Chancellor Villecham, the point is that Mothma attacked Amorosa on her own planet in complete violation of her pardon without just cause in the first place!" Galen argued. "Amorosa only responded with violence when she was provoked!"

"Chancellor, this is outrageous!" cried out the senator from Malastare. "This Sith amasses a fleet of starships all on her own, murders one of the most respected individuals in the history of the Republic, and we are to sit back and let this go unabated over a mere technicality!? We must take action against her!"

"Corellia seconds Malastare's call for action," another senator exclaimed. "Republic forces must put an end to the Sith's threat once and for all!"

"This has placed me in a difficult position here," Villecham said, standing up and glancing between the three Senators who had stepped forward, his advisors flanking either side of him. "On the one hand, the murder of a Senator is not to be taken lightly. Especially not a Senator who has given so much of herself to the Old Republic and the New. On the other hand, when I sent Mon Mothma to Odessen, it was with strict orders to deliberate peacefully. And from Senator Marek's own testimony, Mon only further escalated."

"Amorosa tried to de-escalate, Chancellor," Marek assured him. "She tried to leave peacefully, but she was pursued."

"Amorosa's actions have already caused greater harm to the Republic and have shown her desire for our demise!" One senator from Onderon. "News of Mothma's death has already sewn discord and despair throughout our people. The First Order assails our borders while her forces reap the benefits of anonymity jumping in and out of wild space! We suffer more greatly than her new army and now we suffer because of her. If we do not take decisive action soon, she will orchestrate the doom of us all!"

"Were it not for Amorosa, we would have all been annihilated by the First Order!" Marek yelled. "We show the Sith hostility, and then get angry when she responds in kind? Naboo will not sanction any further hostility against the Sith, and should the Republic choose further aggression, the support of our military will go to *her*!"

"Senator Marek!" Villecham balked. "You are speaking of treason! An enemy of the Republic is an enemy to all worlds the Republic is composed of!"

"Naboo will not sit by while the Republic destroys itself from the inside *again* Chancellor!" Marek exclaimed. "If the Republic chooses paranoia, then Naboo will no longer count itself among them."

"The congress of Lothal concurs with Senator Marek," said another Senator. "Hostility against someone who defended herself will be met with immediate secession. This is not the Empire, Chancellor!"

“Have the governments of Lothal and Naboo not considered the likelihood that this type of secession is exactly what Amorosa hoped to accomplish with her actions?” the Corellian senator pressed. “Your threat only serves to benefit the enemies of the Republic! Not it’s people! A fragmented Senate will make the Core worlds easier for the Sith or the First Order to conquer!”

“The congregation of Rodia agrees with Corellia!” The Rodian senator chimed. “In fact, we move to have the governments of Naboo and Lothal appoint new representatives to the Senate on the grounds of Marek’s declaration of secession!”

“We second the notion!” the Corellian senator said.

“The Declaration of Secession comes from the Queen herself!” Marek spat. “She is sympathetic to Amorosa and has offered her support. A new Senator will only make the same declaration.”

“Malastare would like to remind this Senate that it was a Naboo politician that brought about the ruin of the Old Republic in the first place! We say it is time to consider whether or not they were ever loyal to this Republic at all, or just remain loyal to the ideals of their former master!”

There was a general uproar in the entire senate, hundreds of voices drawing each other out. Galen’s eyes traveled across the entire room to see his ‘colleagues’ all trying to interject, speak over the other or just shout their demands the loudest. It was a sight he was accustomed to seeing, but his familiarity with it did not make it any more tolerable. He couldn’t even begin to remember every instance where the Senate was reduced to unintelligible ramblings and ravings. It was barely more than a year ago that there were those among them that chose inaction when it came to the impending threat of the First Order. Many of those Senators pleaded for a settlement when the First Order became hostile. An action that would have been tantamount to complete and total surrender to the remnants of the Galactic Empire.

The elected monarchy of Naboo was not without its failings, but it was one of the most level headed and reasonable governments the Republic was composed of and Galen was proud to represent it. Queens came and went during his time in the Senate, but the same desire for the good of all and the pursuit of liberty that had guided the planet for thousands of years remained. The knowledge that his planet was among the more sensible ones, alas, only made outbursts like this even more painful to tolerate. The fact that the entirety of Naboo still faced stigma and prejudice for their association with Palpatine did not help either, as it made the vast majority of the Senate quite wary of them.

“Order!” interjected one of Villechams advisors, ushering the entire Senate floor into complete silence. “The fact remains that we are at present stretched too thin fighting the First Order. Can we truly afford to fight on a second front as-”

He was cut off when his control panel started beeping incessantly. His eyes widened in realization to what it meant. An emergency, galaxy-wide transmission was being broadcast on every channel. Flicking the switch to open the channel, the broadcast played through the massive speakers placed all around the Senate chamber.

“At last the work of generations is complete! The great error is corrected! The Republic is set on course to fall, and every world who partook in their foolish rebellion will be crushed! The pawns have played their part. My apprentice has set about the downfall of the galaxy! The day of victory is at hand! The day of revenge! The day of the Sith!”

Everyone in the Senate fell deathly silent. Eyes were blown wide. Faces gone pale. Senators were trembling in their seats at the sound of the voice that was projected over the emergency broadcast. A voice that everyone present recognized. A voice that the entire Galaxy would likely recognize.

Especially Marek.

“...It can’t be,” he whispered under his breath.

Rey and Aliana burst into the War Room, bleary-eyed and half-dressed. They’d been woken up by an emergency call from Leia to meet with the rest of High Command immediately. When they arrived, not only were the Admirals there, but all the Commanders as well. As both women managed to rub the sleep from their eyes, they could see that the entire room looked mortified. Almost like they’d seen a ghost. Even Talon seemed on edge, which was a rare occurrence for her.

“What’s going on?” Aliana yawned, fixing her robes.

“A galaxy wide broadcast was just picked up on all frequencies,” Rose explained, a frightful timbre in her voice. “Everyone from the core worlds to the outer rim all received the same transmission.”

“What was the transmission?” Rey asked, pushing the hair out of her face. “Who sent it?”

Rose swallowed the lump in her throat, unable to meet Rey’s eyes. Rather than answer that question herself, she reached over to the holoterminal and pressed a button, a recorded message beginning to play. A simple audio transmission of what sounded like an old man speaking in a gravely, malevolent voice.

As the message played, Aliana’s brow furrowed while Rey was only confused. By the time it was finished, the two were like night and day.

“He’s *still* alive?!” Aliana balked. “What the kriff?!”

Rey blinked, looking surprised by her wife’s sudden outburst. “Who’s still alive?” she asked. “Who was that?”

“That... was the voice of Emperor Palpatine,” Poe explained, the grave look in his eyes giving away his otherwise stone faced demeanor.

Rey’s eyes widened with clarity. “...Oh.”

“Great. Just great. Between the First Order’s garbage and the Republic breathing down our necks, now there’s this guy. As if we don’t have enough problems,” Aliana groaned as she looked Leia dead in the eye. “So what’s the plan?”

Leia met her eyes, glaring unspoken yet unmistakable contempt right back at her. “...Seriously?”

“Yes, seriously,” Aliana scoffed. “How are we going to go about this? What’s everyone thinking?”

Leia only continued to glower at Aliana, which wouldn’t have been too different from normal, except suddenly she noticed that nearly everyone was looking at her. Across the War Room, she saw expressions with varying levels of confusion, hurt and even anger.

“...Why are you all looking at me like that?” she asked, starting to feel unsettled.

Rose, once again opting to remain silent, pressed another button on the terminal, causing an excerpt on the recording to play again.

“My apprentice has set about the downfall of the galaxy! The day of victory is at hand! The day of revenge! The day of the Sith!”

“Okay, so what about it? So the idiot has an appre-” Aliana stopped, then winced as realization dawned on her. The ominous choice of words in the message. The eyes that bore into her at every angle. The look of confusion and betrayal on some of their faces. They thought SHE was ‘the apprentice’. “...Oh you’ve gotta be kriffing kidding me.”

“Don’t you even start!” Leia hissed. “You do not get to just brush this off! Not this time!”

“Amorosa,” Holdo said, folding her arms and looking at Aliana with a guarded expression. “You need to explain yourself.”

“Explain what? I’m not Sidious’ apprentice!” Aliana balked. “I’m the Dark Lady, not the apprentice to some bumbling fool! I thought the idiot was dead!”

“Aliana, I’m sorry, but...” Rose paused, wincing as though she were in pain as she struggled to find the right words. “...This all coincides too well to be a coincidence.”

“What coincides too well!?” Aliana demanded.

“The emergence of a ‘Sith Fleet’ in the galaxy,” Holdo replied. “The division that has been forming in the Republic Senate since your steady rise to power. The fact that several key members of the original rebellion who fought against his Empire are now dead with your presence being the common factor with many of them. Any one of these could just be a coincidence, but not all of them at once.”

“That’s not true! Only Mothma and Solo are dead, and the latter wasn’t even my fault!” Aliana said with a huff. “Oh wait! Skywalker too! But again, that wasn’t my fault!”

Rey remained silent at her wife’s words. The day of Luke’s death played over in her mind. The day the Force came so dangerously close to taking away the woman she loved and he had to give up the entirety of his life force to save her. A last act of... atonement was not the right word. Recompense, perhaps. For all the pain and fear that he caused her. For all he took away from the Sith that could never be given back. Aliana never knew about that, however. From within her coma, she had no memory of Luke pulling her back from the brink. All she knew was that Luke was dead. She took solace in the fact that the man who murdered her mother was gone. Telling her why would have only soured the catharsis she knew she deserved.

The only other person who knew was Leia, who looked just about ready to reveal the truth in response to Aliana’s words. Rey glared at her, a silent command that said *‘Don’t you dare!’* Only when Leia took note of Rey’s glare and visibly wilted beneath it, did she feel confident enough to turn her sights back to Aliana.

“Aliana Beniko,” she began, gently cupping her wife’s cheek and bringing her attention over to her. “Before I made you my wife, before I even told you that I loved you, you made a promise to always be honest with me. Do you remember that promise?”

Aliana nodded emphatically. “Yes, I do. I remember it *vividly* .”

Rey noted every minute nuance on Aliana's face before she continued. "I am asking you now to keep that promise," she said, her voice giving away nothing. "Is what they suspect of you true? Do you have anything to do with Palpatine's... resurgence?"

"No, I don't," Aliana shook her head without missing a beat. "I've never worked with Palpatine in my life. I've despised that man and the order of Sith he comes from for most of my life. His apprentice killed my grandmother. His line have always been my family's mortal enemies."

Rey looked at Aliana carefully, letting her words hang in the air for a moment before, eventually, she nodded. "Okay. I believe you," she said, wrapping her arms around her.

"Really?" Leia scoffed. "Just like that?"

"Just like that," Rey confirmed, shooting another warning look at the General. "And if any of you have a problem with that, then just know you'll have to go through me if you dare try anything."

"Rey this is a little more serious than a lover's quarrel," Holdo said firmly. "Under normal circumstances I'd be inclined to trust your judgment but everything lines up too well. There is just too much stacked against her for this to be a coincidence."

"Rey I'm sorry, but I agree," Rose said, a meekness in her admission.

"What will it take to convince you all that I'm innocent?" Aliana asked, looking around the war room.

Everyone exchanged uncertain looks with each other, each person no doubt imagining a different price of evidence than the other. Indecisiveness and tension hung thick in the air about the room. The silence was enough to begin making Aliana nervous, prompting her to shift closer into Rey's touch.

"Who do you hate more?" Poe asked, his voice breaking the deafening silence. "Palpatine or the Republic?"

Aliana was quiet for a moment as she weighed that decision. In truth, it seemed like a simple answer. Just say Palpatine and it would all be over. But unfortunately, it wasn't the truth. Aliana hated Palpatine, but she always saw Palpatine as a symptom of a wider rot in both the Old and New Republic. The killing blow to a system that was already decaying from the inside out. She still hated the man, but hate was not rooted in personal experience. The man died before she was even born.

"...The Republic. Palpatine died long before I was born," Aliana said quietly. "The Republic's hostility is more... personal. It has wider consequences. I could kill Palpatine again and he wouldn't be an issue any more. I can't kill the Republic."

"Alright, it's not you," Poe said without missing a beat.

The War Room collectively looked at Poe with bewilderment.

"That is... certainly a bold conclusion to draw, Commander Dameron," Holdo said, her brow furrowed. "Especially with how Amorosa chose to answer."

“If she had said she hated Palpatine more, I would have known she was lying, Admiral,” Poe reasoned with absolute certainty in his tone. “Her hatred of the Republic would absolutely run deeper than her hatred of Palpatine. Trying to sweep all her grievances under the rug to try and save face would have been what broke the entire act. In all the time I’ve known Aliana, she has only ever lied to one person, and that person is now her wife. *Meanwhile*, Palpatine has a long and outstanding record of lying his pasty, wrinkled ass off.”

Holdo raised an eyebrow to Aliana. “The only person you ever lied to was your wife?” she asked. “What was the lie?”

Aliana rubbed the back of her neck and looked down at the floor. “Uh... I didn’t tell her I was a Sith Lord,” she said sheepishly. “And... she was the only one I didn’t tell.”

“I stand corrected,” Poe amended. “She didn’t *even* lie. She simply withheld information. Now I’m absolutely certain it’s not her. She’s been one of the most frank people I’ve ever met and that reality hasn’t changed.”

“In all her work in Hutt Space, Amorosa never once concealed the fact that she was a Sith Lord,” Talon said. “Not even when Jedi were around. Sidious and his ilk always worked in the shadows. Always trying to hide under the Jedi’s noses. Hell, most of the galaxy didn’t even know he was a Sith Lord until after his death. But Amorosa was a rallying point for a lot of people. It’s the only reason we have the fleet, because she spent so much time helping the people of the Outer Rim. She asked for aid, and people volunteered en masse. Her method is incompatible with Sidious”

Rose pursed her lips introspectively, the gears in her head starting to turn. “The structure of the First Order is based on the Galactic Empire that Palpatine organized,” she mused. “It would be odd for Aliana to be in league with a Sith whose system of government was openly hostile to gay women, among others.”

“Yeah, I’m not a Coruscant socialite writing wartime fiction,” Aliana scoffed.

“What?” Rey arched a brow at her wife.

“Oh yeah, as the war’s been getting more publicized in the core worlds. A lot of misinformation, a lot of propaganda, and a lot of rich women on Coruscant who have been writing fictionalized versions of it and us,” Aliana explained with a sickened frown.

Rey looked positively aghast at what Aliana was describing. “Wait, so there are people in the Republic writing fantasized scenarios about our *actual* lives?”

“Yup,” Aliana nodded before her brow furrowed, another thought coming to her. “Well, actually, I wouldn’t say that it’s *our* lives,” she amended. “Apparently I’m not in any of these stories.”

Rey’s brow furrowed in kind. “You’re not? Then who am I married to in these... fictions?”

“Well... let’s just say that reality or fiction, you have a thing for Dark Side force users,” Aliana said, giving her wife an apologetic look.

“...Talon?” Rey guessed.

“Nice,” the Twi’lek said with a wide grin.

“Everyone! Focus!” Holdo pleaded. “Look, even if we are to believe that Aliana is innocent, how do we convince the Republic of that?”

“What’s the Republic going to do? They can’t fight on two fronts, they’re stretched thin enough as it is,” Rey shrugged. “It’s the involvement of our forces that has given them any breathing room. I say let them stew in their bitterness. It’ll all be a moot point when the First Order is destroyed.”

“If we do not prove her innocence, every Resistance member will be branded as a traitor to the Republic for affiliation with you,” Holdo countered. “And even if we defeat the First Order, there’s no guarantee that any of us will be pardoned by the end of this.”

“If the Republic is willing to buy into this idea that Aliana is a traitor and condemn us all for that, why would we want anything more to do with them?” Rey asked.

Holdo let out a weary sigh. “Rey, there are people here who still have families in the Republic. While they understood the risks of joining the Resistance, being branded as traitors to the government they’re fighting to defend was not one of those terms. Every Resistance fighter here could spend the rest of their lives separated from their loved ones back home.”

“We’ll have to reach out to them as quickly as possible then,” Poe reasoned. “Convince them that Aliana has nothing to do with Palpatine’s return. Senator Marek should take our side on that.”

“I worry that Senator Marek, and perhaps all of Naboo, may suffer consequences for this turn of events as well,” Holdo countered, her expression somber. “It has been hard for them to shake the shame of producing Palpatine in the first place.”

Rose turned her gaze to Leia, a curious quirk in her brow. “General Organa? You’ve been surprisingly quiet. Do you have any thoughts about the situation?”

Leia had her hands on the holoterminal, staring down at the waveform of the recording. Her silence during a discussion of the Sith’s loyalties was unnerving at best.

“...Amorosa, can I speak to you in my office?” she said finally, standing up straight.

Aliana’s eyes widened a fraction. “...Seriously?”

Leia nodded, already moving towards a door off of the War Room.

Confliction troubled at Aliana’s pursed lips, taking a moment to consider before looking up at Rey. “I’ll be right back.”

“Are you sure?” Rey asked, her grip on Aliana tightening protectively. “I can come with you if you’d rather not deal with her alone.”

“I’ll be fine, sweetheart,” Aliana said, rising on her toes to place a soothing kiss on Rey’s lips. “Though it’s certainly chivalrous of you to protect me so.”

Rey’s grip on Aliana’s arm tightened even further. “But... how can I be sure you’ll be okay?”

“I’m powerful, sweetie,” Aliana assured her, reaching up to touch her cheek. “ *Very* powerful. I’ll be fine.”

Rey looked just about ready to whine, not willing to relinquish her grip on Aliana. It took a moment longer of gentle coaxing from her until she finally loosened her grasp around her waist. “Alright,” she conceded. “But please let me know if she gives you any trouble, okay?”

“You’ll be the first to know,” Aliana smiled as she pulled away from her and followed Leia to her office.

As she walked away, Poe leaned in to whisper in Rey’s ear. “You’re going to pace outside the door waiting to sense something, aren’t you?”

“Is there any kriffing doubt?” Rey huffed.

Aliana sat down in front of Leia’s desk, her hands folded in her lap. This entire moment had “Headmaster’s office” written all over it and it made her feel like she was fourteen again.

‘I never even went to school,’ she thought.

Leia’s gaze was cast down to her desk for a moment. Aliana could tell that she was either choosing her opening words carefully, or just trying to reel in her quick temper. Ordinarily, she would have said the latter was more likely, but Leia was already made painfully aware of how Aliana would respond to another careless insult.

“Amorosa,” she began, lifting her gaze to look at the Sith. “I am not going to lie. I never trusted you. Not even for a moment. And now I am presented with evidence to suggest that my suspicions of you were vindicated all this time, and somehow you manage to spin the situation and get nearly the entire War Council to vouch for you. I am certain you can understand how frustrated that makes me.”

“I didn’t spin anything, I just answered their questions,” Aliana said sheepishly. “Look Leia, this isn’t like the other times, okay? The other times you were making accusations with no proof. Now someone is actively trying to frame me. I know things are different this time. I’m just as unhappy about this as you are.”

“Somehow I doubt that,” Leia sniffed, her eyes narrowing. Before Aliana could so much as scoff however, she continued. “Talon has suggested that your way of being a Sith is incompatible with Sidious’ method. That you do not commit yourself to subterfuge. But you yourself have given evidence to the contrary.”

“I did?” Aliana arched a brow. “When was that.”

“Moments before you killed Mon Mothma,” Leia clarified. “You told her that your mother’s name was Tahleea Beniko. One of her closest friends and an ally to the Republic. Was this true?”

Aliana nodded. “My mother did a lot of crucial jobs in the early days of the New Republic. Diplomatic outreach, supply runs, fighting the Remnant, you name it and she did it. She and Mon Mothma were very close along with another Senator. Not unlike Rey, Finn and Poe honestly.”

“Why?” Leia asked, her eyes narrowing. “If your family hated the Republic, why would she do such a thing?”

“Well... my mother always hoped things could be different,” Aliana explained, staring into her lap with a sullen look on her face. “That maybe if she helped, she could bring the Sith into the Republic and do some good outside of the occasional union rally in Hutt Space. Her, Mothma and the other Senator were so close that for a while it seemed like things might change. Unfortunately that change would have required her to tell them all that she was Sith. She never did. She was afraid to.”

“So your mother was a Sith who managed to infiltrate the Republic you grew to despise so much and yet you claim that you wouldn’t be willing or able to side with Sidious to see it destroyed?” Leia pressed.

“I hate the Republic, but I don’t want to destroy it,” Aliana said. “All that would do is create a power vacuum for the Hutts to dominate the galaxy. And for all the Republic’s evils, it isn’t anywhere close to the Hutts.”

“So you wouldn’t replace it with your own Sith Order?” Leia challenged, her expression highly skeptical.

“A Sith Order would be too small to hold back the Hutts,” Aliana sighed. “I’ve never wanted to rule the galaxy, Leia. I’m not cut out for leadership.”

“Then what exactly *do* you intend to do when this is all over? Fade back into obscurity like the rest of your family? Drag Rey along to constantly be on the move for the rest of your lives? You wouldn’t have gone to the trouble of amassing an entire fleet for the war effort if you didn’t stand to have something to gain when this all is over. What is it?”

“The fleet are just volunteers who were under the thumb of the Hutts. I helped them over the last ten years and... when I asked for help they came calling,” Aliana shrugged. “When the war’s over... they’re going to go back home. I didn’t amass a fleet. I rallied support. Sure I called them the ‘Sith Fleet’, but that was just mostly to get under your skin. As for Rey...” She trailed off and started wringing her hands in her lap.

“...I tried. I really tried to change things so Rey wouldn’t have to be on the run the rest of her life,” she said quietly. Her voice was barely a whisper. “I really did try, but the Republic just kept showing me hostility. I don’t know how to ease tensions with the Republic, Leia. Everything I’ve tried to do has been a failure. I saved them from total destruction, failed. I rallied a fleet to aid against the First Order, failed. I tried to negotiate with Mon Mothma. She attacked *me* !”

Leia’s expression became guarded. Adamantly against the notion of letting Aliana’s words get any sort of a rise out of her. It was almost eerily neutral if Aliana hadn’t known she was holding her real reaction back.

“What do you wish would happen?” she followed up. “In an ideal scenario, where do you and Rey end up when this is all over?”

Aliana’s brow furrowed. “...Are you asking me where I see myself in five years?”

“Answer the question, Amorosa,” Leia said flatly.

Aliana shrugged. “I don’t know,” she said quietly. “The most I can honestly see is... Rey going on to rebuild the Jedi Order into something that stands for justice in the galaxy. And me... probably assassinated by a sniper.”

Leia's expression remained guarded in the wake of Aliana's response. For a single, tense moment, she carefully considered the information.

This behavior was very much unlike Palpatine. Even before the Republic fell, he had always appeared to be poised and in control. There was very little that he didn't plan for. Very few rogue elements for which he had no contingency in place. With the unveiling of that galaxy wide message, it seemed that his contingencies ran deeper than anyone would have suspected. In the face of anyone, especially his enemies, he was calculating and calm.

Aliana meanwhile, was no such thing.

In fact, sitting in that office, her eyes downcast and her expression uncertain, she seemed practically aimless. She confessed to having given no thought to the future beyond the end of the war. She didn't even seem to envision having a long and happy marriage with Rey. There was no guise of control that Leia could discern from her behavior. She just looked lost.

It was at that moment that the suspicious nature of Leia's questioning took on a different air.

"If that is the kind of bleak future you see for yourself, then why are you still Sith?"

Aliana blinked. "...Pardon?"

"If the title of Sith has given you and your family nothing but grief, why hold onto it?" Leia clarified. "Why not just doff that mantle and become one of Rey's... new age Jedi or something of the like?"

Clarity dawned on Aliana and soon after another crestfallen countenance. "I've thought about it," she admitted. "I've thought about going by my birth name, changing the crystal in my lightsaber and just... never looking back. But..."

"...But?" Leia pressed.

"...The day my mother was killed, we were on Corellia so she could do a job for Senator Karist," Aliana explained, staring into her lap and blinking away the first inklings of tears. "...That was the day she dubbed me Darth Amorosa. It's the last good memory I have of my mother."

Leia bristled slightly, the reserved mask she was wearing starting to crack. "And it is for that reason you would wear that title to your grave?" she asked.

Aliana nodded. "My mother was a good woman, Leia. She was kind to everyone. She believed in helping people. It broke her heart whenever she had to take a dirty job to make sure I was taken care of. And then your brother killed her because she was Sith..." Aliana's eyes watered beyond the point of holding them back and she reached up to rub them dry.

Leia's mind turned inward, memories of Tahleea Beniko coming to mind. She did not know her as well as Mon Mothma had, but she did know her to be a kind and respectable person. Lovely smile and with a sincere compliment or playful jab. She spoke passionately about change and reformation to ensure the New Republic did not make the same mistakes as the old. The kind of woman anyone would aspire to be.

After Aliana revealed the truth to Mothma in her final moments, she had begun to wonder if that kind woman was just a mask she used like Sidious used the mask of Palpatine. In this office,

however, sitting across her daughter who was on the verge of weeping, she was beginning to consider the opposite.

In the wake of that realization, she wasn't exactly sure what else to say.

"...What if Rey chooses to become a Sith alongside you?" she asked. "What then?"

"I don't know," Aliana said. Her voice was cracking worse and worse. "If she does, there won't be any Jedi to come after us but... the thought of something happening to her terrifies me."

"You wouldn't even give up your title of Sith for her, then?" Leia asked. "To ensure that Rey does not end up like your mother?"

"I... I can't." Aliana's eyes closed as she fought hard to keep from crying. Not like this. Not in front of this Jedi. "I can't do that. That'd be like forgetting my mother. And I don't want to forget my mother. I loved my mother..."

That did it. She covered her face with her hands and broke down into tears and pitiful sobs.

Leia grew tense at that. She had seen Amorosa in several compromising and even vulnerable positions. For kriff's sake, she saw her in a coma for months! But to see her cry, see her so consumed by her own guilt and loneliness that she broke down in tears, it unnerved her.

"Amorosa, I..." Leia was cut off by a particularly sharp sob. Her lips pursed into a thin line as the crying continued. "I didn't mean anything by..."

Aliana only continued to sob pitifully into her hands, her legs curling up onto the chair as she huddled into a ball. "Why?" she whimpered. "Why did they kill my mom? She wasn't doing anything..."

Leia bristled. Of all the things she was prepared to deal with after Aliana entered this room, her balling up and crying wasn't it. Suddenly she looked so much smaller. So much younger than the lethal and ruthless Sith Lord she knew her to be. Those cracked, pitiful sobs could not have been fabricated. This was the farthest thing from an act. Aliana was reduced to tears before her.

It wasn't long before the guilt began to follow in the wake of that realization.

"...I'm sorry."

Aliana's sobs slowly died down, but her composure remained shattered. By the time she managed to collect herself and unfurl from the ball she'd made of herself, her face was a mess of tears and grief.

"I still don't know why," she whimpered. "Why did she have to die?"

Leia thought back to the very last words she heard from her brother.

'They're good kids. Make sure they make it through this. The galaxy will need them'

She dwelled on the fact that her brother, a Jedi, said such things about a Sith. She puzzled over what could have compelled him to think such a thing. What belief? What certainty? What-

...What guilt? What shame he must have felt for taking this girl's mother away from her like he did.

"She didn't," Leia said quietly, earning a look of confusion from Aliana. "I knew Tahleea and she was every bit the woman you described. She was too genuine to just be a Sith mask. What... what Luke did to her... and to you that day was wrong."

Aliana wiped her eyes, smearing the makeup that usually framed them. "...Thanks," she said pitifully. "I miss her so much. I need her. I can't deal with the Republic, I don't have the political experience she did..."

"You'll-" Leia cut herself off, her eyes closing for a brief moment of deliberation before she continued. "We'll think of something."

Aliana blinked. "...We?"

"Well the fact of the matter is that you've already convinced half our War council that you're not Palpatine's secret apprentice," Leia conceded with a shrug. "Whether I like it or not, we're in this debacle with you, so we all have to work together to see the end of it."

"You're not... you're not going to throw me to the wolves?" Aliana asked, looking confused. She'd expected for this to be the point where she was thrown out of the Resistance. Accusations of being a secret apprentice to Darth Sidious straight from the old geezer's mouth were hard to fight.

"You've convinced too many of us of your innocence," Leia said. "And honestly, I am much less certain of your guilt than I was moments ago."

Aliana finished wiping her eyes on her cloak. She'd never felt so vulnerable before. Not even when Rey was holding her at gunpoint to confess her feelings. "...That means a lot, Leia. Thank you."

"If you could indulge me a moment?" Leia asked, waiting until Aliana tentatively nodded. "The Senator your mother was friends with. Who was it?"

Aliana looked uneasy. "Uh... if I tell you, you have to promise not to breathe a word about it."

"Very well," Leia nodded. "It doesn't leave this room."

"...Senator Tiralli," Aliana explained.

Leia looked surprised. "Tiralli? The Dantooine Senator? Why does that need to be kept secret?"

"Because if his friendship with my mother got out, it could destroy his political career," Aliana said quietly.

"Why?"

"...He's my father."

Leia blinked, her mouth falling open slightly. "...You're serious?"

Aliana nodded.

A beat of silence passed before Leia responded with. "...Oh, Kriff me. One of our senators is the father to the Sith Lord." An utterly exasperated sigh escaped her lips before she took a moment to center herself again. "...Does he know?"

"No. My mother never told him about me," Aliana shook her head. "It would have just complicated things since we were Sith. She told me about him, though. I... never really tried to contact him after my mother was killed. It's one of the reasons I asked you not to give my real name to the Republic."

"...I see." Leia's brow furrowed pensively, her fingers drumming against the surface of her desk. "So you would not be interested in him ever discovering the truth?"

"...I'm not sure," she said quietly. "I mean... what would I say? Hey, guess what? The terrifying Sith Lord that's got the Republic in an uproar is your daughter! I can't imagine that would go over well."

"Fair enough." Leia nodded, turning her attention to the present, and a datapad on her desk. "...Alright, Amorosa. The fact of the matter is that the Resistance isn't going anywhere so long as there's a war to fight so you don't have to worry about us cutting ties with you. I'll work with High Command to see what kind of damage control we can perform. That being said, I would advise you to just... prepare for the worst. In general."

"Alright," Aliana nodded as she stood up, taking a moment longer to fuss over her already ruined makeup before turning for the door.

"One more thing," Leia said, reaching out to stop her from leaving. "The Resistance is getting to be too large to lead with a mini-senate. I'll need to expand the leadership to handle managing everything. I'm putting the control of the Outer Rim fleet, the Jedi, the Sith, and whatever Finn's new Stormtrooper squad is calling themselves under the control of a second General."

"...Oh?" Aliana arched a brow. "Am I to understand that you're planning to promote Rey?"

"No," Leia shook her head. "You."

Aliana blinked. "Wait... me? But why? This morning, you still hated my guts, didn't you?"

"I've been... reconsidering my behavior toward you for a while. And after everything you told me, it's become clear to me that I've been unfair. At times, cruel," Leia explained. "Consider this a show of good faith. You're a good fighter, Amorosa. And you've forgotten more about galactic history than I've forgotten. But most importantly... a war like this is going to require tough decisions. And a commanding officer needs to be able to make them. I know if it comes down to it, you *will*."

"Oh..." Aliana was speechless for a moment. What could she have said to that? Leia actually decided to place some trust in her? She thought she would never live to see the day. She had assumed Leia's Force Ghost would still be suspecting her of ill will in the future. A part of her was beginning to consider that this might have been a trap. Such a thing would have been astronomically illogical, of course, but she couldn't help but suspect it for a moment. Perhaps it was Leia's untrusting nature that rubbed off on her slightly.

"Well... thanks again," she offered somewhat sheepishly. "I will make sure not to squander this good faith of yours."

“Good,” Leia nodded. “Oh, and be sure to tell Rey so she doesn’t disembowel me for making her wife cry.”

Aliana huffed with laughter and nodded. “Will do,” she said, pushing the door open and leaving Leia’s office. To her immediate surprise, Rey was right outside the door and almost immediately scooped her up on her arms.

“Alie! Are you okay? I thought I heard-” Rey paused her eyes widening as she saw black streaks that trailed down Aliana’s cheeks. “...Did she make you cry?” She asked, her voice suddenly growing a touch colder.

“It... was a long and emotional talk,” Aliana winced. “...My mother came up.”

Rey’s eyes suddenly surged with dark power as she leered at the closed office door, looking ready to just crumple the metal it was composed of without lifting a finger. “I will break that old crone in half,” she hissed.

“Rey wait!” Aliana said, cupping her cheeks and forcing her wife to look at her. “She said she believed me. She even promoted me to General.”

The growing yellow in Rey’s eyes suddenly faded back to their usual warm brown. “...Wait, really?” she balked. “Why? I mean... what was her thought process?”

“That... I was a good fit. And that she could count on me to make the tough calls if they needed to be made,” Aliana smiled a little. “I think telling her about my mother and her deals with the Republic actually got through to her. She even said Luke killing my mother was wrong. She’s never said that before.”

“Oh... wow.” Rey looked back at the closed door. “...She actually changed her mind. I... I had begun to think she never would.”

“Me too,” Aliana nodded as she wiped her eyes again. “Can... can we go back to bed? This whole conversation dredged up some really painful memories and... and I just want to go back to bed and cry.”

Rey’s expression softened, her hand rising to stroke Aliana’s cheek. “Of course, darling,” she said softly, wrapping an arm around the small of Aliana’s back and leading her out of the War Room. Her eyes turned up to see the rest of High Command. “Will you guys be alright for awhile? We just need some time to... reflect on what’s happened.

“Don’t worry about us,” Poe insisted. “The Galaxy isn’t going to fall apart just because you guys need a nap.”

“Thanks Poe,” Rey smiled as she guided Aliana outside and back to the ship. After all that time spent worrying, and then fretting over the fact that Aliana was crying, she wanted to just take her wife back to their quarters and hold her until the heat death of the universe.

Do You Still Struggle With These feelings?

Chapter Notes

TW - Suicide Mention

Rey quite liked the night, when the ship went into low power and the base went into a quiet rest save for the small night crews. It was the only guaranteed time of peace where she could really stop and think. The Fury's engines thrummed comfortably around her as she lay nestled in bed with her wife. Aliana had fallen asleep two hours ago, snuggled up close and laying against Rey's chest. It was one of the few times that Rey got to appreciate just how tiny Aliana actually was. The way her wife's smaller frame just slotted so perfectly against her own was part of what convinced Rey that they were meant for each other. The Force and destiny be damned. If there was anything to be certain about it was that she belonged at Aliana's side. Where she could hear her gentle breathing as she rested comfortably, see the utterly peaceful expression in her already beautiful face and feel her steady heartbeat thum against her bare skin in an ultimate sign that she was calm and relaxed. That Aliana was safe in her arms.

"Is there anything more perfect than this?" she whispered as she stroked Aliana's hair.

She loved her hair. Aliana's pretty curls coiled down her back in a beautifully unkempt style. She'd been surprised to learn that Aliana had that style deliberately, and spent at least an hour in the morning getting it just right. She's honestly assumed that she just straightened her hair with her fingers in the morning and went off about her business. But no, her look was meticulously maintained. Aliana put a great deal of time and effort into her appearance which Rey couldn't help but respect and also find utterly endearing. Though it did make it all the more perplexing as to why Aliana insisted that Rey herself was positively flawless.

There were times where she would be working on the engine to the Fury, covered head to toe in grease, and Aliana would just look at her like she was Naboo royalty. The black robes Rey acquired back on Coruscant was the most effort she put into her looks in as long as she could remember, and yet Alie had always looked at her as though she were a goddess. It befuddled Rey to this day that someone so beautiful could be in such awe of her when she didn't even try.

Then she remembered how they met. How Aliana had approached her and negotiated a trade, but had been looking at her the entire time as if she was trying to seduce her. And, as she later admitted, she initially had been. Aliana had taken one look at her and decided she wanted her in her bed before she caught feelings and backed out. When she was still a scavenger on Jakku who spent all day in the sand and was barely able to clean herself. Whatever it was that Aliana saw in her Rey couldn't quite say, but she was nonetheless thankful for it. It was all enough to keep this beautiful, intelligent and absolutely perfect woman in her life. She would have thanked the Force for blessing her with Alie if she didn't already know that very Force was what attempted to drive them apart. So she would just have to thank Alie herself. For sticking beside Rey all that time. Even when things got really bad.

Rey sighed and closed her eyes as she remembered the times things *had* gotten really bad. Or rather, when she made them really bad. Though Aliana maintained that Rey had every right to be furious with her for lying about who she was, Rey simply couldn't settle that with how things were between them now. She might have had a right to be angry, but her behavior had crossed into outright abuse at times. Especially on the Falcon when she all but threatened her to tell her everything.

She could remember how panicked, fearful, and upset Aliana had been. And how she'd only gotten more upset as she explained herself... and confessed her feelings.

Rey still hated herself for that. She hated how she let her anger control her in that moment. She hated how scared she made Alie with that anger. She hated how intensely she made Alie suffer during and since then. That poor woman nearly destroyed herself probably for Rey's sake, all as recompense for something Rey should have forgiven her for a hundred times over. Before things got as bad as they've been between them.

"I'm so sorry, Alie," she whispered, holding her wife tighter. "I'm so sorry I was so cruel to you. All you wanted was to not lose the only friend you had, and I spat it back in your face."

Rey hated herself for how she'd treated her. How she'd threatened her, and then proceeded to act extremely coldly toward her for so long, only being friendly when she needed something. All the while continuing to indulgently ogle her while they were on Ahch To. And what did Aliana do the entire time? Educate her, cook for her, and provide support whenever she needed it. All while being on the same planet, the same *landmass*, of the man who murdered her mother.

Aliana desperately wanted to keep her friendship, and Rey hadn't even acted like a friend. She acted more like...

She stopped that train of thought before it produced hallucinations again.

Those days were over, and Rey's anger and shame towards herself kept her from making that mistake again in her life. She couldn't risk doing anything that might cost her Aliana. Not again. Not after the way she very nearly lost her. With how intertwined their legs were, Rey could feel the absence of Aliana's left leg, her prosthetic laying securely in its case by the end of the bed. Rey's mind leapt back to how Alie lost her leg. How she very nearly lost her life if not for a one in a million miracle. How Rey spent months without hearing Aliana's beautiful voice, seeing her sparkling ruby eyes or her adorable smile. It was the worst point of her entire life by far.

Her fingers ran over her back, feeling the roughed mixture of scar tissue and synthskin around what used to be a near-fatal lightsaber wound. It was only impromptu surgery and selective healing that had stopped it from becoming fatal. She'd read the report over and over again. Aliana had barely clung on by a thread while Rey was carrying her out, and needed so much work. Her fingers drifted up her back, feeling the scar running up from where 2V had removed her severed spine and replaced it with cybernetics. That's how bad the wound had gotten. She'd not only nearly lost Aliana, she'd gotten a grisly lesson in just how deadly a lightsaber was.

These weapons carried by *peacekeepers*.

Rey thought about the Jedi. She thought about the stories she was brought up in by way of hearsay from pilots passing by and old story tellers. She thought about how quickly she became disillusioned with that expectation of Jedi in Aliana's. She thought about the real reality that what it ultimately meant to be a Jedi now rested on her shoulders. She would decide what the Jedi would

look like in the future. Though many would argue that her concept of Jedi had a great deal of overlap with the Sith, she didn't inherently find anything wrong with that notion. To many others, to be Sith meant to be like Sidious. To Rey, being Sith meant being like Alie.

Aliana shifted in her arms and nuzzled into her chest, muttering something incoherent under her breath. Rey giggled and sunk down further into the bed. Aliana talked in her sleep. Sometimes something incoherent, sometimes funny, sometimes nightmarish. It was easy to tell when Aliana was having a nightmare because she became erratic and twitchy, and Rey knew to wake her up when that happened. She never had nightmares when Rey held her, however.

This was the woman the Republic was terrified of. This tiny, short, inconceivably beautiful woman who fussed over her hair for an hour, whistled Cantina songs when she cooked and could barely replace a fuse on the ship that she lived in. Rey felt the urge to break into a full belly laugh at that notion, but instead opted to snuggle more closely to Aliana. It was in moments like this that she was the most confident that the Republic acted solely on fear. That their paranoia towards this adorable woman was in no way rational. If they allowed themselves to see Aliana Beniko as Rey saw her, they would have been erecting monuments of her all throughout the core worlds.

But they refused to see her as anything but a potential threat. A potential tyrant. And as a result, Aliana refused to even try changing that belief. Aliana had told her the story before they'd gone to bed, about how her mother had tried to work within the Republic. To do something to stem the already brewing corruption from both Imperial remnant and Confederate worlds who wanted to practically enslave the galaxy for their bottom line. She'd tried for most of her adult life to help build something better.

And then the Republic killed her anyway.

Aliana had been so shaken by that, she completely wrote the Republic off. She refused to negotiate with them, instead making her intentions clear and refusing to accept their objections, and drew hard lines with them and their people at every possible opportunity. She had explained that trying to be peaceful only led to her mother being murdered, and that if the Republic and the Jedi were going to have itchy trigger fingers, she would never deactivate her lightsaber. She wasn't just mourning her mother's death. She was bitter. She hated the Republic for it, and would never forgive them. She confessed that were she and Rey not dragged into this conflict, she would be content to sit and watch while the Republic and the First Order destroyed each other. That she'd saved the Republic from Starkiller base *not* because she believed something could change, but so Rey would know she could be trusted.

That Alie would risk her very life to save a system that had done nothing but take from her and despise her, all for Rey was sobering, to say the least. It made her instinctively press a gentle kiss to the top of Alie's head, her actions met with a gentle, appreciative murmur.

"I won't let them get you," she whispered into Aliana's hair, her voice quiet yet resolute. "I'll tear the entire Republic apart if it means to keep you safe."

Aliana shifted in her arms and sighed happily, occasionally twitching or muttering in her sleep. Rey wondered what she was dreaming about. Whatever it was, it was a good dream. She looked so peaceful. So serene. So *happy*. Perhaps it was a hopeful dream. One with the two of them far away from the war, from the Republic, the First Order, from all of it. Somewhere remote but habitable where they could live happily. Someplace green, too. The greener the better.

Rey couldn't help but giggle slightly at her own train of thought. In truth, she hadn't given a great deal of thought to what her life might be like after the war. She just knew that she wanted Aliana to be there. Of the few hopeful fantasies she envisioned in passing, Aliana was the one constant. It was the one thing that was non negotiable. She knew Aliana wanted that. She'd told her everything about the conversation with Leia that afternoon. How she envisioned the two of them settling on some remote planet for at least a few years, just enjoying spending their time together in married bliss. It was all surprisingly domestic, but for a woman who valued family as much as Aliana did, it was exactly what she expected from her. To have a permanent home and just... live. Not the ambitious and underhanded scramble for power the galaxy came to expect of the Sith, but Rey was certainly not complaining.

Perhaps that was why Rey never really settled on a solid plan for what to do after the war besides just being with Aliana. Aside from her, the details didn't matter. She was flexible on everything else.

"Maybe we can settle on Kashyyyk," Rey mused to herself, languidly stroking Aliana's hair as she spoke softly. "See who could find the tallest tree to jump off of. Go hunting for dinner every day. Make our living repairing ships and hustling wookies in arm wrestling contests."

She nuzzled closer to Aliana's hair, taking in the pleasant aroma of rose water that seemed to follow her wherever she went.

"Or maybe an uninhabited world, where we're the only ones there. Build a homestead in the forest and just keep to ourselves. We've certainly earned it, haven't we?"

Aliana only twitched in her arms, snuggling closer and mumbling.

"Yes, that might be better, wouldn't it?" Rey asked with an ever widening smile. "A place where all we'll have is each other. Where all we need is each other. A place to just be a family."

That was another thought. A family. So far such a concept extended to her, Alie, 2V and Porgracing, though there was nothing suggesting that it couldn't grow from there. Aliana literally came from a family of Sith so the idea of a successor surely had crossed her mind at least once in her life. A child to call her own and carry the mantle onward into the future. Would she still want such a thing with Rey, however? More to that point, would *Rey* want that? She never considered it in her life, though being a scavenger waiting for a family that was never returning certainly didn't give her much opportunity. The idea of raising a daughter with Aliana did sound tempting, but something about the thought tugged at the back of her mind in a way she couldn't comprehend. Something that yelled at her not to.

Was it because she couldn't guarantee that child's absolute safety for the rest of her life? Was it the chance that both she and Alie could die and leave her all alone at a very young age? Just like they had been? Did Kylo Ren ever place a perverse thought of putting a child in her at any point of their force bond? Was it the Force itself trying to pull her away from Aliana again? Whatever it was, it was just a lingering feeling, but a persistent one. She couldn't help but be a little frustrated at this troubled feeling. It wasn't as though the thought of having a family with Aliana itself was what perturbed her. Far from it. She was the one woman in all of the galaxy she would even consider this kind of future with. And yet still there was something in her mind telling her not to. Perhaps it was the fact that she couldn't pinpoint why she was feeling this way that was the most frustrating thing of all.

“Sometimes it feels like you know my own mind better than I do, Alie,” Rey whispered wistfully, looking back down at the woman sleeping soundly in her arm. “I mean, here I am, a mess of jumbled thoughts and disjointed sentences, and here you are knowing exactly how to respond without being conscious.”

Aliana hummed in her sleep and nuzzled into Rey’s chest. Her legs curled up, her cold foot brushing against Rey’s bare leg.

“Eep!” Rey squeaked. “Why are your feet so cold. I need to get you some thick, wool socks.”

Aliana mumbled incoherently and tightened the arm around Rey’s waist.

Rey only smiled and settled down again. She wasn’t sure why she couldn’t sleep, but getting to enjoy the way Aliana nestled against her wasn’t something she was about to complain about.

As the night went on, Rey’s thoughts started drifting to the Force. The Force was about the only thing standing between them. It’s machinations were determined to drive them apart, either by trying to remove Aliana from the picture, or tethering Rey elsewhere. She never had to worry about the Dyad becoming a problem at night, as their bedroom was always shrouded in the Dark Side. It couldn’t reach her here. But it could still weigh heavy on her mind regardless. There was also the reality of her growing power to consider. When it came to feats of raw strength, she was nigh unrivaled. She was able to shield Aliana against the Void on Nathema so well mostly because she had the power to spare. That mission was the most she ever got to test the limits of her growing strength, though it was still impressive.

Still, that power came at a price. Several in fact. For starters she found fine tuned control of the force to be especially difficult. She tried to dismantle and reassemble a lightsaber hilt through the Force, a traditional act amongst Jedi, and only succeeded in crushing all the pieces into useless scrap. She once waved her hand to unlock a powered door and then ended up blowing it clean off the frames, nearly injuring a Resistance worker. Anything that wasn’t a show of destructive power was becoming harder and harder for Rey.

She then remembered something. A voice of wisdom she sought in a time of great need.

Do not allow yourself to be in a position where the Force has leverage over you. The folly of Jedi and Sith alike is dependency. If you can give up the Force and still live, then the Force will have no more sway over you. The Force is but one of your many talents.”

That was right. She’d resolved a while ago to not rely on the Force. So she couldn’t use fine control. That wasn’t a big deal. She still had her hands. And assembling a lightsaber with her hands was more satisfying. She shouldn’t have been using the Force for these things anyway. Darth Traya’s words had wisdom to them. She was a Sith Lord who spent so long in visions that her eyes had atrophied from disuse, and she became reliant on the Force to see. A wave of confidence welled in Rey’s chest. It didn’t matter that the Force was becoming less and less reliable. She was a scavenger before anything else. Any problems she needed to fix, she could literally build. There was little the Force could offer her that some well learned technique couldn’t cover. The Force couldn’t stop an enemy opponent from using her own lightsaber against her if they got a hold of it, but a thumbprint ID plate on the chassis certainly could.

She glanced down again at her wife. Aliana was very different. Aliana used the Force for a lot of things, even flying her ship. And without it, she was at a severe disadvantage. She’d used the Force to patch the holes in her skillset and it had become as necessary and second nature to her as a hand.

And while she'd tried to coax Aliana to be less reliant on the Force, it simply hadn't taken. Aliana had grown up with the Force. It was a part of her now.

That meant the Force always had a window to reach them. To hurt them.

Rey's jaws clenched, her eyes clamping shut. No. She wouldn't think like that. She wouldn't fall into that spiral of anxiety. This was just another problem that she could fix. It just required a little more ingenuity. So Aliana was very dependent on the Force. That wasn't an unsolvable problem. She was the leader of an entire fleet of starships. She could delegate matters to other people rather than the Force.

There was just the question of whether or not she *would*.

Rey knew on some level that she was overstepping. She couldn't protect Aliana from everything. Aliana wasn't just some run of the mill Force wielder, she was the Dark Lady of the Sith. She was powerful, wise, and cunning. She didn't actually need Rey trying to shield her from the galaxy. While she appeared small and frail asleep in her arms, Rey knew that when push came to shove, Aliana was fierce and *ruthless*. She was someone who executed a Senator for sedition and dared the Republic to do something about it. She wore an iron-tight mask around others, and could back up her words in a heartbeat. And she ultimately didn't care whether her allies approved of her methods or not. Against the cruelty of the First Order, the greed and amorality of the Hutt Cartel and the corruption and hypocrisy of the Republic, anything was a preferred alternative.

Rey understood that she couldn't protect Aliana from everything or that she necessarily needed to do that. But that didn't stop her from wanting to. It didn't stop her from wanting Aliana never to experience the unbearable pain she has endured ever again. It would always be something she would have to struggle with, she supposed. Knowing when to trust Aliana's abilities and judgement and when to intervene to spare her any suffering. That would be the balance she worked to keep. A balance more important to her than the state of the Force.

"I won't stop you from making your mark upon the galaxy," Rey resolved quietly. "No matter how dangerous it is. I just ask that I be there alongside you all the while."

Aliana mumbled and squeezed her tighter, snoring softly.

"...You are so cute," Rey whispered as she cradled her wife.

Her wife. There was a time where the idea of being married couldn't have been further from her thoughts. Where it seemed pointless. Unimportant. Where even the idea of a partner at all seemed pointless. Now, she wasn't sure how she lived without Aliana. The thought of building a life with her when this was all over excited her. The thought of being without her was the subject of her most harrowing nightmares.

Aliana had apparently differed. She'd been a romantic her entire life. Of all the feats her ancestors Caida and Lana had achieved, their love story was the one she liked the most. A pragmatic Sith Lord who won the heart of a Jedi disillusioned by her Order's stilted ways and assumed a Sith name after marrying her.

'Now why does that sound familiar?' Rey mused to herself as she smiled at Aliana.

Aliana stirred and lifted her head, groggily rubbing at her eyes. "...Rey?"

“I’m here,” Rey whispered, kissing her forehead.

“Okay,” Aliana mumbled, laying her head back down on Rey’s chest. “Had a dream... you were off world... didn’t come back...”

“Oh, darling,” Rey cooed sympathetically, her arms tightening ever so slightly around Aliana. “It’s okay. I’m still here. I’m not going anywhere.”

“Good...” Aliana mumbled, squeezing her tighter. “I love you... you’re the brightest light in my sky...”

Rey felt a fluttering in her chest. By the stars! Half asleep and Aliana could still floor her with romantic language. Her lips brushed against her wife’s forehead once more, releasing a croon of approval as she did. “And you are the shade that brings me relief in the deserts of the galaxy,” she said in kind.

Aliana sighed happily and leaned up to catch Rey’s lips in a soft, tender kiss. “You’re so sweet,” whispered. “You know, tomorrow is our anniversary.”

“Already?” Rey smiled, enjoying the flavor of Aliana’s lips as it lingered on her own. “Goodness this marriage is just flying by. I’m not sure if I’m fond of that. I was hoping to savor it.”

“I meant we’ve been together for a year,” Aliana giggled. “It’s been a year since that night on Ahch To.”

Rey blinked, realization dawning on her face. “...That’s right,” she whispered, a sheepish expression growing on her face. “I... I’m surprised you’ve been keeping track of that. Especially since our relationship didn’t get off to the best start.”

“Even when it’s been rocky, I’ve still treasured every moment with you,” Aliana smiled, her eyes fluttering closed. “...I don’t know if I ever told you this, but I wasn’t in the best place before we met.”

Rey was quiet for a moment. It was true that Aliana never technically told her that, though she certainly gathered it the more she learned about her wife. The years between her mother’s murder and them meeting was a rough point in time for Alie. “...It wasn’t my place to ask.”

Aliana fidgeted, before deciding to just sit up. “...Do you want to know?” she asked, looking at her wife with tired eyes. “I don’t want to put any pressure on you or make you feel like you’re responsible for my mental health or anything.”

Rey smiled, leaning down to plant a gentle, soothing kiss on Aliana’s lips. “I will think nothing of the sort,” she assured her. “You’ve never placed any pressure on me before and I’d be a fool to think you’d start now. If you are willing to share, then I am willing to listen.”

“Okay,” Aliana nodded. “...The day you met me... was the day I was planning to commit suicide.”

Rey’s body tensed slightly. A small gasp of shock nearly fell from her lips until she managed to reign it in. She looked at Aliana, surprise and sadness in her eyes. “...Alie...” she whispered.

Aliana nodded, a look of shame in her eyes. “I’d been alone for so long, and I couldn’t take everything that was piling on top of me anymore. So I planned to fix the ship’s hyperdrive coil so I

could ram it at lightspeed into Jakku's Sun."

Rey frowned, instinctively reaching a hand out to cup Aliana's face. "Oh sweetheart," she said, her voice breaking slightly. "Can... can I ask what stopped you?"

"After you left, I felt a disturbance in the Force at a village not far from the Outpost," Aliana explained. "That was how I got roped into... all of this. I decided I might as well help find the droid, and... and honestly I hoped doing that would mean I'd get to see you again..."

Rey blinked. "...Really?" she asked. She wasn't sure why that surprised her to hear, but it did.

Aliana nodded. "You were the first person since my mother died who I told my real name," she explained. "Who I didn't immediately tell that I was Sith. And... you were so friendly to me, and so nice to be around, and... and I felt... *good* that evening. I wanted to see you again before I left. Before I..."

Rey couldn't help but smile at that. And she certainly understood what it was that Aliana meant. It wasn't that she was the only thing that was keeping her alive. It was that, sometimes, a little kindness at the right time was enough to keep someone from making a horrible decision. With her free hand, she reached down and grabbed one of Aliana's, squeezing it tenderly. "I am glad we got to see each other again," she said softly. "Even then, I was glad."

Aliana squeezed her hand as a few tears silently slid down her cheeks. "I'm glad too."

Rey's brow furrowed as something came back to her. Shortly after they'd met, Aliana had been, for lack of a better word, reckless. She fought Kylo Ren with her bare hands, she exhausted herself to the point of collapse on Ilum, and charged headfirst into three Knights. Then there was that night where they were deciding what to do about the Supremacy, and Aliana had casually suggested blowing herself up with a Thought Bomb.

Aliana's confession of having planned to kill herself made all of those things seem a lot less like self-sacrifice and more like deliberate attempts to end her life.

How long had her wife been battling with suicide?

"Alie?" Rey prompted, her face still clear with concern. "I want to ask you something, but I hope you know that you don't have to answer if you don't want to."

Aliana was quiet for a moment before she nodded. "...Okay."

"...Do you still struggle with these feelings?" Rey asked. "Of suicide?"

Aliana bristled, and in the dim light of their bedroom Rey could clearly see her recoil in shame. Everything was tense and quiet between them, before Aliana slowly nodded.

Rey's frown deepened, her hand squeezing Aliana's instinctively. "Oh, Alie," she whispered somberly. A moment later, she rose to sit upright alongside her, pulling her into a hug.

Aliana graciously accepted the hug and squeezed her wife tightly. "It's not as bad as it was before," she assured her. "But with the Republic and Leia... it isn't helping. Sometimes things just get to be too much. But I'm not having to handle it alone anymore, which makes it easier."

Rey smiled against the crook of Aliana's neck, feeling assured enough to pull away just enough to meet her eyes. "That's good to hear," she said. "And I hope you know that I want to help make things easier for you. And I'm not just saying that out of obligation or pressure, so don't you worry about it."

"Thanks," Aliana smiled, laying her forehead against Rey's. "It feels good to get that off my chest. I really am happy with you, Rey. I'm not-"

"It's okay," Rey assured her. "I know this doesn't mean you're unhappy. You've been through a lot, and that's not going to just be undone in a year. I love you, and I'm not about to take your pain personally."

Ruby eyes began to glisten with welling tears, a small choked noise escaping Aliana's lips. "...Thank you," she whispered almost breathlessly.

"Of course, darling," Rey smiled. "Don't think that this is enough to deter me. I'm in this for the long haul. No matter what."

"Me too," Aliana nodded. "I love you so much."

"I love you too."

A Minute to Work Through Your Gay Panic

Aliana grumbled as she rolled out of bed, her hand absently slapping at the holoterminal. Whoever was calling her at this hour was going to get the business end of her lightsaber down their throat. She hit the button and pulled herself up just enough that her head would be in range of the holo-receivers. No way was she letting some random caller see her naked this early in the morning. “What is it? What do you want?” she grumbled just before Galen Marek appeared on screen. “Oh. Lord Starkiller.”

“Lady Amorosa,” Marek nodded with a smile. “Not a morning person, are you?”

“Not since I got married,” Aliana yawned. “What’s going on? The Republic wanna cross examine me a third time?”

“Actually no,” Marek said, shaking his head. “I’m actually acting on an authority closer to home. The Queen of Naboo to be precise.”

Aliana paused before shifting upright to better face the terminal, wrapping a blanket around her otherwise bare form. “The Queen, you say?”

“Indeed,” Marek nodded. “I trust you’re already aware of the transmission that’s been blaring about the galaxy. Well, the Republic has been in a tizzy about it. Very few in the Senate or the Republic at large are willing to respond to this message calmly and rationally. The crown, on the other hand, has requested to share a dialogue with you about this and how it can affect our professional relationship going forward.”

“I’ll save you both the trouble. I’m not Sidious’ apprentice. The man just announced himself my rival and I’m going to stab him in his crusty, ancient head,” Aliana yawned as she pulled the blanket tighter around herself. “The Sith are mine.”

“Oh, of that, we have no doubt,” Marek said reassuringly. “It’s just that, to put matters bluntly, the rest of the Republic is willing to succumb to fear mongering and expecting the worst of you and your people. That’s something that, given recent events, the Queen can very much sympathize with. She wishes to invite you to our planet as her personal guest so that you both can share a dialogue.”

Aliana’s eyes widened in surprise. “Oh, that’s... interesting. Uh... tell her I’ll set off as soon as my wife wakes up and we’ve had something to eat. Expect us in a few days time.”

“There is a matter you should be aware of,” Marek warned. “The Republic has blockaded Naboo, believing them to be allied with Sidious. Their history and the Queen’s vocal support of you has prompted a response and now the Fleet is in orbit.”

“Not to worry, I can punch through a blockade,” Aliana shook her head. “The Fury’s a warship and there are two Force users on board.”

“Well, alright then,” Marek nods. “I will inform the Queen to expect you in a few days. May the Force serve you Well.”

Aliana smiled and nodded, flicking off the holoterminal. She sat back on the edge of her bed and let go of the blanket.

“...Well. Today’s looking up.”

The Fury dropped out of Hyperspace to over two dozen ships surrounding the lush, green planet of Naboo. Marek hadn’t been kidding when he said that the Republic was in panic-mode.

“Hail the lead ship,” Aliana said, sitting back in the captain’s chair. “We might as well try to be civil before we waltz right inside.”

“Aw,” Rey said with a feigned pout. “And here I thought we were going to get to behave like absolute scoundrels today.” She chuckled before turning her gaze to the console and flipping a switch. “Hailing them now.”

“If things go badly, I’ll let you shoot out an engine,” Aliana giggled as the holoterminal lit up with an image of Chancellor Villecham. “Ah! Chancellor! I’m Darth Amorosa, and I need to get through this blockade.”

“The planet of Naboo is currently under lockdown, Darth Amorosa,” Villecham said grimly. “Our Blockade is authorized to use deadly force on those not sanctioned to pass through.”

“I don’t suppose there is a flagship we can land on to make our case?” Rey asked, prompting the Chancellor to turn his attention to her. “Rey Beniko, by the way. We’ve met right?”

“No there isn’t,” Villecham frowned.

“Why is Naboo under lockdown, Chancellor?” Aliana asked innocently.

“That is official Republic business that you are not at liberty to know,” Villecham said dismissively. “I must strongly urge you to turn your vessel around and be on your way.”

“Well, never let it be said that I tried,” Aliana shrugged, glancing at Rey. “Take us down to Theed, sweetheart.”

“Yes ma’am,” Rey said with a devilish grin, flipping the switch back and cutting Villecham off mid protest. “Hold onto something.”

The thrusters flared with power as the Fury bolted for the planet. The nearest ships had primed their weapons and opened fire before Rey effortlessly swerved their ship out of harms way. Her evasion tactics were unorthodox but effective. Only moving to dodge their turbo lasers at the last possible moment. Making it impossible for them to try to aim where the ship was going rather than where she was.

“Almost there,” Rey called back, her gaze fixed out the viewport. “Wow, they’ll just let anyone in the Republic military, huh?”

“Well they can’t all be Poe, can they?” Aliana smirked as she fastened herself in. “You know I could get used to you taking orders from me.”

“Oh?” Rey tilted her head just enough to flash Aliana a positively sinful grin. “Should I start calling you ‘Master’ again?”

“Master, Dark Lady, it’s all very hot,” Aliana grinned back, bouncing her eyebrows.

“Well, *Dark Lady*,” Rey purred, pushing the thrusters back to maximum to lung the Fury forward, past another torrent of turbolasers and passed the blockade. “One Fury flown safely to Naboo. As requested.”

“By the Force, you’re perfect,” Aliana cooed, reaching forward and dragging the back of her fingers over Rey’s cheek. Her wife leaned into the touch, a gentle coo humming in her throat.

“Mmm, playing on my need for praise,” Rey said with an almost wistful sigh. “That’s playing dirty, sweetheart.”

“Sith,” Aliana reminded her, getting out of her chair and wrapping her arms around Rey’s neck, taking small nips at her ear. “All I do is play dirty, remember?”

“Oh, I could never forget,” Rey purred, tilting her head slightly to give Aliana more room to kiss and nip at her. “If you think I am not painfully aware of all the things you can do to me, of all the things you *would* do to me, then you clearly take me for a-” Her eyes fell upon a particular button on the dashboard, her eyes widening a margin and her breath stilling. “...A damned fool...”

Aliana, sensing the sudden change in the mood, looked at Rey curiously. “...Something wrong?”

Rey pointed to one of the switches that was still lit. “...I think Villecham can still hear us.”

Aliana tilted her head and shrugged. “So the Republic knows I can make my wife writhe in bed, big deal,” she said, flicking the switch down and cutting the transmission.

“Well, yes. I just don’t want to risk them being,” Rey pursed her lips pensively as she looked back out the viewport. “...What’s the word? Not voyager, but...”

“Voyeur?”

“Yes, that,” Rey nodded.

“Trust me, the worst that can come from this is a few tabloid rags saying I literally seduced you to the Dark Side,” Aliana giggled, kissing along Rey’s neck. “Which honestly? It’s not a bad look.”

Rey let out a gentle sigh, her mild point of contention swiftly forgotten. “Mmm, point taken,” she murmured in a slight daze. “...Which way is Theed again?”

“Northern hemisphere, bearing 343,” Aliana said as she wrapped her arms around Rey’s waist. “Can’t miss it, it’s a beautiful city perched on a cliff. It’s like if you were architecture.”

Rey let out a peculiar hybrid of a giggle and shudder, turning the ship in the aforementioned direction without even looking out the viewport. “W-Well,” she began with a hitched breath. “This is my first time meeting proper royalty. Anything I should know?”

“Well you might want to take a shower before we land,” Aliana giggled. “I might have gotten used to it, but Theed is a very clean and spotless place. Can’t go in there with you smelling like engine oil.”

“Oh of course not,” Rey chuckled. “I must look presentable next to my Dark Lady of the Sith.”

Aliana grinned wickedly and ran her fingers down Rey’s chest. “Yes you do. Can’t go into the palace without my precious Jedi looking her best, can I?”

Rey let out a gentle sigh, her head lulling back in response to the affection. “Does that mean we have to behave ourselves?” she asked, her voice keening ever so slightly.

“Unfortunately, that’s why I’m smothering you now instead of later in the city,” Aliana cooed.

A smile returned to the Jedi’s lips. “I can live with that,” she chuckled. “Perhaps we should both take that shower. You know... for safety.”

Aliana’s grin returned and she grabbed Rey’s hand. “I think you might be onto something there,” she said, pulling Rey out of her chair and out of the bridge.

2V watched them leave, before shaking his head and taking the helm. “Marriage only made her more voracious.”

Theed was positively gorgeous. Rey had never seen a place this beautiful in her life. Coruscant was a smog-infested hellhole, Takodana was lush and pretty, but in a somewhat archaic way, and all the other places she’d been had been single dwellings or Niima Outpost. But Theed... Rey might just faint with how positively pristine and gorgeous the city was. The buildings were elegant and impressive, complimenting the vibrant fauna around them rather than seeming intrusive. There were spires and domes made from stone so warm and shining, it almost looked like bronze. They managed to appear ancient and advanced all at once. It was that paradox that made Rey’s head spin.

“Alie,” she whispered, seizing her wife’s hand. “I’ve never seen a city this lovely before.”

“I told you, it’s like if you were architecture,” Aliana grinned.

Rey scoffed, a flattering shade of red dusting her freckled cheeks. “You better stop with that talk,” she huffed. “You said I was supposed to behave myself. I even wore my special robes for this meeting.”

“I can see that,” Alie said, her eyes roaming up and down Rey’s form to take in the sight of flowing dark Jedi robes that somehow hugged her lithe frame ever so deliciously.

“Hey! If I have to behave, so do you missy!” Rey said, swatting her wife’s shoulder.

“I am behaving, I’m just... admiring my wife,” Aliana giggled, leaning in to press a kiss to her cheek.

The blush boldened on Rey’s face, prompting her to squeeze Aliana’s hand a little tighter. “I thought you admired me to your fill in the shower,” she whispered.

“Oh, Rey. I could never get enough of you,” Aleiana purred.

“Ah! Ladies!” Came a voice snapping both women to look up front again. Senator Marek approached them, a notable spring in his step, making him look quite spry for his age. “I’m glad you see you both have made it.”

Aliana nodded with a smile. “Well we almost didn’t. Between the blockade and... well, each other we were almost late.”

Marek smirked, giving a knowing look to both women. “It is good to see you haven’t changed, Lord Amorosa,” he said with a nod of respect.

Rey's cheeks did not lose a shade of red as she cleared her throat and inclined her head respectfully to Marek. "Senator. Thank you for having us. I assure you the blockade was nothing we couldn't handle. Though I am concerned as to why the Republic has taken such action against one of their own worlds."

"The pleasure is all mine, Master Jedi," Marek said with a smile and nod of his own. "And your concern is definitely shared by the populace. It's one of the reasons the Queen has called for your wife."

"Just me? Not the both of us?" Aliana arched a brow as she glanced back at Rey.

"Well, yes, but the Queen made a point to say that an audience with the Dark Lady is of utmost priority," Marek amended. "I figured that Rey's presence was more or less implied, regardless." He turned slightly, gesturing to the palace near the square of the city. "On that note, shall we?"

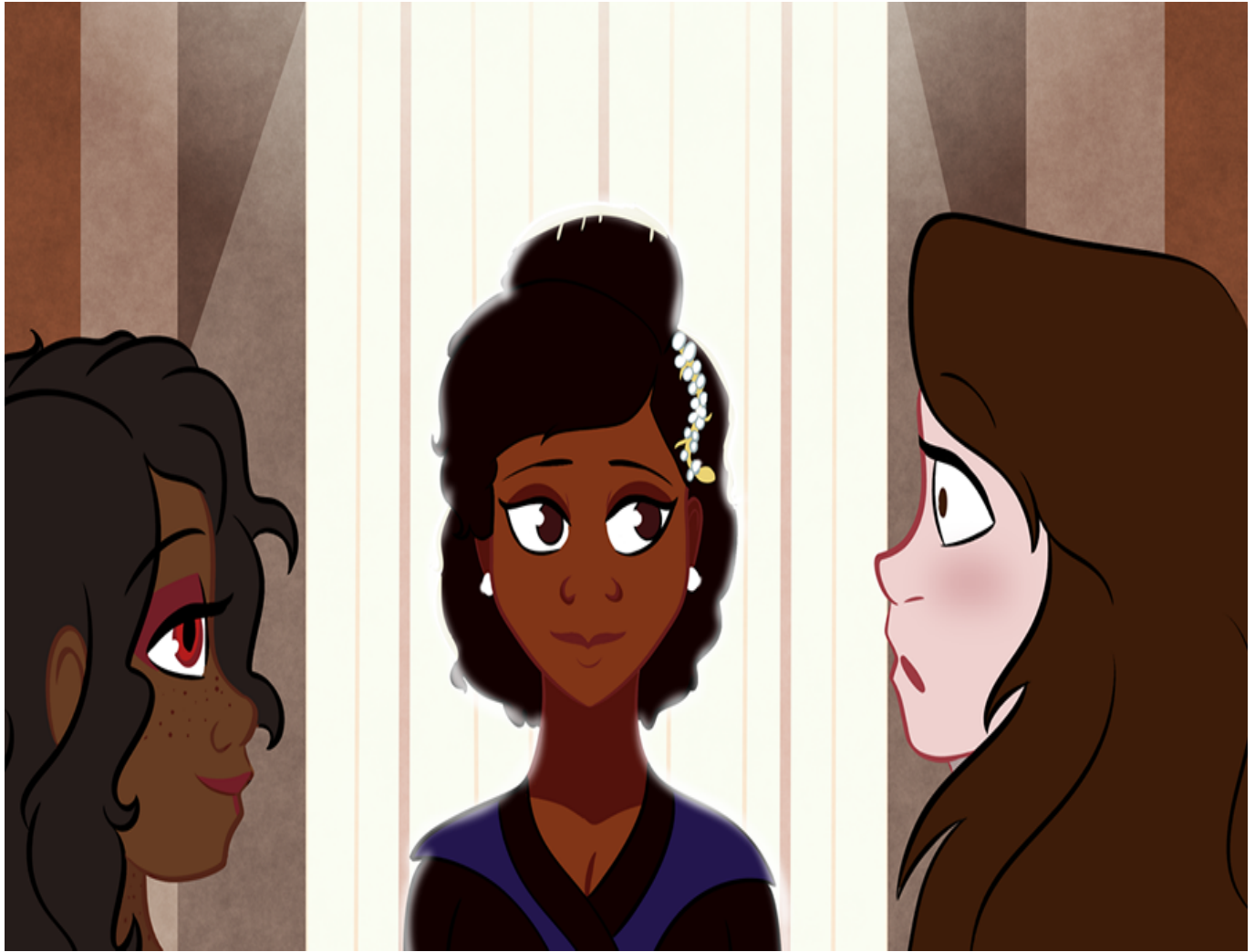
Aliana took Rey's hand again and nodded. "Alright, let's go," she said.

The two of them followed Marek into the Throne Room, and Rey had to stop to take it in. It was practically gleaming with polished stone and elegant steel. Everything in the Palace seemed to be made with the sole purpose of looking as beautiful as possible. "It's gorgeous," she whispered.

"Wait until you see the Queen," Marek chuckled.

Those words were as much warning as Rey received before her eyes fell upon the center of the grand chamber. There, draped in the warm beams of sunlight from the tall windows on the far wall, was the Naboo Queen.

Ordinarily, Rey would have found the amount of ornate regalia the monarch was wearing to be gaudy and garish. In this case, however, it was breathtaking. The flowing red robes had her cut a striking figure, especially as she rose from her seat. The jewelry and headwear she was adorned with was less intricate than those of previous Queens that she researched on the Fury's databanks, but nonetheless regal in the way it framed her dark hair. Her skin, unlike Aliana, was bereft of any freckles. Thought that did not make her any less stunning.



“...Alie,” she whispered breathlessly, squeezing her wife’s hand tightly.

“What?” Aliana asked, squeezing her wife’s hand back. “What’s the matter, sweetheart?”

“She’s *gorgeous* !” Rey whispered.

Aliana giggled and turned to kiss Rey’s cheek. “Do you need a minute to work through your gay panic?”

“Don’t be mean,” Rey said, her hushed words dangerously close to a pout.

“Your majesty,” Senator Marek prompted, standing to the side as the Queen approached. “May I introduce Darth Amorosa and her wife Jedi Master Rey Beniko.”

“Lady Amorosa, Master Jedi,” the Queen greeted with a polite, but not impersonal smile. “Naboo is blessed by your presence here.”

“That’s very appreciated, your Highness,” Aliana smiled as she and Rey approached her desk.

“I see you’ve taken a nubian approach to your makeup,” the Queen chuckled, tapping at her bottom lip.

“Oh yeah,” Aliana smiled, touching her bottom lip as well. “Old family tradition. My ancestor, Darth Caida, was Nubian herself.”

“I see. Interesting how things have come around since then,” the Queen said, her smile lingering before a moment longer before her before her overall demeanor sobered. “I would be delighted to know more about your heritage, but I am afraid we are without such a luxury at the present time. I trust you have seen the blockade on your way in.”

“Indeed I have,” Aliana nodded as she and Rey took seats in front of the desk, their hands still clasped. “We had to slip through it on our way down. The Republic’s been acting more and more strangely. I mean, attacking me I can kind of understand. I’m a Sith Lord, they freak out. But Naboo?”

“This blockade is a result of the transmission all but advertising the return of the late Emperor Palpatine,” the Queen explained before stepping to exit the throne room, silently beckoning for the others to follow. Aliana and Rey remained just a pace behind her as she continued. “Our world has a history with the Sith too recent for many’s liking in the Senate. Not only was Palpatine born and raised here, but the previously revered Padme Amidala bore the seeds of his apprentice, Darth Vader.”

“So, because of that, the Republic suspects that you’re still in league with this spectre?” Rey asked.

The Queen nodded.

“That makes little sense. Amidala might have bore Vader’s children, but Vader’s children were revered public heroes,” Aliana frowned. “Sure the both of them are as rotten to the core as their father was, but the public doesn’t know that.”

“Opinions in the Senate are... fickle to say the least,” the Queen sighed. “Being a War Hero or a Jedi Master might save your reputation, but that will do little for naboo.”

“And I take it that Sidious’ remark about an apprentice tearing the Resistance apart means they think you’re in league with me?” Aliana asked.

“Quite,” the Queen confirmed. “Before that transmission, the Republic mostly disregarded us, shooting down many of the proposals we brought to the Senate and treating us with general wariness, but little else. Now, however, they have succumbed to fear and have placed my people in a stranglehold.” She halted in her stride and looked upwards to the sky, where a Republic cruiser was just visible at the lip of the planet’s atmosphere. Her expression turned grave. “Without concrete evidence that no Sith influence exists here, the blockade will soon give way to occupation and then all of Naboo will be a republic vassal. Stripped of our heritage and made vulnerable to the corruption within.”

“And you can’t prove a negative, which means the Republic will inevitably create martial law,” Aliana nodded as she glanced out at the cruiser as well. “...So what did you want to call me here for?”

The Queen turned to look at Aliana. “My advisors pleaded with me to publicly condemn you and your associates in the hope of playing at the Republic’s mercy. That I should placate their fear mongering rather than seek help elsewhere. But I refuse to bend the knee to a Republic who refuses to treat our world with respect and dignity.” Her words were seeped in a growing air of disdain and frustration before she took a calming breath to center herself once more. “It is for that reason that I

ask you for help, Lord Amorosa. Be it from your powerbase or that of your Resistance Allies, Naboo humbly requests your aid.”

Aliana glanced back out at the cruiser and frowned. This was the first time an entire planet had asked for her help before. And she wasn’t even sure she could... Then it occurred to her. All the Outer Rim worlds that pledged to support her would want to take the fight to their Hutt oppressors when this was all over. And Naboo was a mid-rim world that was the closest civilized outpost to most of the Outer Rim. Given the planet’s history and it’s wealth... “I have an idea, but I’m not certain you’ll like it,” Aliana said.

The Queen’s brow furrowed slightly, her expression equal parts curious and concerned. “As Queen, it is my duty to do whatever it takes to ensure the safety and well being of my people, Lord Amorosa,” she said. “If what you have in mind guarantees both, I am certain I can live with it.”

“My power base is a borrowed one,” Aliana explained. “Many of them are volunteers who want to liberate their homes from the Hutts when this is all over. Not only are they going to need allies, but they’re going to need a foothold to attack the Outer Rim. Here is my offer. I’ll clear the blockade and position a guard around Naboo, and in return Naboo will secede from the Republic and help the Outer Rim fleet take back their homes when this is over, and pledge to be their allies once they do. The Republic will only become emboldened to make bigger and bigger trouble for the galaxy if there isn’t a rival alliance to hold them back.”

The Queen’s lips pressed into a thin line, Aliana’s proposal turning in her head for a moment. “...The price for your help is a steep one, I must say,” she said softly. “However, that is to be expected.”

“Do you find these terms acceptable, Your Majesty?” Aliana asked.

“...I do,” the Queen nodded. “However, there are others I must first speak to before I can make this agreement a reality. My position is an elected one, you know. Without binding accords, the other branches of government may seek to undo my decisions once my term is spent. I will have to deliberate with our many regions before anything is cemented.”

“Seceding from the Republic isn’t something that is easy to undo, your Majesty,” Aliana smirked. “But I understand. We’ll remain on Naboo for a week while you deliberate and prepare to clear the blockade if you decide to accept my offer.”

A gentle, appreciative smile returned to the Queen’s lips. “You are far kinder than the Republic gives you credit for, Lord Amorosa,” she said, an air of fondness in her voice. “Rest assured, you and Master Beniko will be honored guests in the palace for the remainder of your stay. Senator Marek is seeing to your accommodations as we speak.”

Aliana nodded. “Thank you, your Majesty. I’m sure Rey will appreciate getting to see the city. She’s been gushing about it since we landed.”

“Hush!” Rey whispered, slapping her shoulder. This only succeeded in making her wife giggle.

“Have you?” the Queen inquired, turning her gaze, and smile, to Rey. “Well, it is certainly flattering that our people’s culture has earned the favor of a Jedi, Master Beniko.”

Rey’s breath hitched as she momentarily fussed with the sleeves of her robes. “Well... I am simply one who appreciates beauty when I see it, Your Majesty. No doubt the rest of your city will be just

as... enriching with a closer inspection.”

The Queen’s smile turned to a smirk as she glanced at Aliana. “You snagged her right out of the closet, didn’t you?”

“Oh yeah,” Aliana grinned wickedly. “Unlocked the door myself.”

Rey sputtered, her blush returning. “What... is that supposed to mean?”

“Oh, nothing, sweetheart,” Aliana insisted, rising to her tiptoes to kiss Rey’s reddened cheek. “Just city talk.”

“You live on a ship, how do you have city talk?” Rey frowned.

“I travel,” Aliana scoffed.

“You two are adorable,” the Queen giggled.

“Thank you your majesty,” Aliana grinned as she threaded her fingers with Rey’s. “It’s very validating to hear such praise from an authority figure for once.”

“Oh, I imagine,” the Queen said, before an approaching figure called her attention. A handmaiden briskly walked up to her, leaning close to whisper into her ear. “...I see,” she said, giving the handmaiden a thankful nod. “It would seem my advisors have caught wise of our meeting and wish to... discuss matters with me. You’ll forgive my abrupt departure?”

“Of course, your Majesty,” Aliana smiled.

“Thank you,” the Queen smiled right back. “And please. Call me Tahraya.”

“Of course, Tahraya,” Aliana nodded. “My name is Aliana.”

“What a lovely name,” Tahraya said softly before turning to follow her handmaiden down the corridor.

Aliana watched them depart, a lingering smile on her cheeks before turning to Rey. “So what do you think?”

“Oh. Um... well she’s certainly beautiful, obviously,” Rey began, rubbing the back of her neck. “She’s very kind. Accommodating. Forthcoming too. An-”

“I meant about the plan,” Aliana said with an amused smile. “It’s good to know where your head is at though, *Master Jedi*. ”

Rey’s cheeks flushed a bright pink. “Oh...”

“Do I need to worry about my wife running away with a Queen?” Aliana teased, wrapping an arm around Rey’s waist.

“What? No! Of course not! You know I’d never-” Rey’s stammering insistence was cut off by a fit of giggles Aliana erupted into. “...You’re awful,” she said with a pout.

Aliana pressed her lips to Rey's in an appeasing fashion. "And you're wonderful," she purred. "So you were saying?"

Rey sighed, closing her eyes for a moment to clear her thoughts. "...It's a good plan," she said. "I just can't help but worry that the Republic is counting on us intervening. Use all this to justify declaring war on you when the First Order is gone."

"That's the thing. You think there's a potential future where they *don't* declare war on me," Aliana shrugged. "I see it as inevitable. The moment I revealed myself, I became a threat. And there's nothing I can do about that other than go back into hiding. The Republic can't and won't let me live peacefully, and they can't and won't change. So I'm not going to bother *trying* to get them to change."

"That's fair," Rey conceded, her arms wrapping around Aliana's waist protectively. A fluster and sheepishness was gone from her expression, her eyes shining with a resolute conviction. "I just... hate the idea of stepping into this war on their terms. It doesn't sit well with me. I don't want them to have control here."

"That's the thing, it's not going to be on their terms," Aliana smiled, bringing her hands up to cup Rey's cheeks. "Don't worry. I know what I'm doing."

"I know you do," Rey said softly, leaning into Aliana's hand. "I know the Republic can't outwit you. And they certainly can't outfight the two of us. That doesn't mean I'll stop fretting. I don't want another Coruscant." Her mind went back to the brief time she spent on that awful planet. Where she had to throw herself at the mercy of those who despised her wife. Where they very nearly gunned her down while she was comatose before Rey managed to stop them. Where she felt the misery and corruption of an entire world all but suffocating her. It was Hell. Pure and simple.

"There won't be another Coruscant, I promise," Aliana whispered, running her hand down Rey's cheek. "But I can't just let the Republic oppress a planet that has done no wrong, either."

"Of course," Rey nodded. "I would never suggest leaving this planet defenseless. Not when they need us."

"Thank you."

It was sundown by the time Marek showed them to their suite. By the time Rey stopped gushing about how immaculate everything in their suite was, the stars were littering the sky. Without all the pollution of other populated planets like Coruscant, the night time view was as breathtaking as it was on Odessen. Rey found herself leaning against the railing of their balcony, looking up and trying to find the star that led home from where they were. Reaching her senses outward, she detected something else instead.

Lifeforms just outside the planet's atmosphere. The Blockade. The reminder of their presence, though not nakedly visible to her, caused her to frown. Their very presence here was a testament to the arrogance and paranoia of the Republic. No one on this planet was associated with the spectre of Palpatine, but the Senate and their Chancellor did not see fit to heed reason. So they resorted to fear. IT sickened her, causing the Dark Side to roll off of her body in waves. She looked at one hand, feeling the power that burned just beneath her skin. More than enough power to deal with the crude matter of a few ships. That thought led her hand to reach outward to the night sky, willpower beginning to take form when-

“Hey,” Alie prompted gently, draping her fingers around Rey’s wrist and easing her arm back down. “You okay?”

Rey snapped back to attention, her wife’s gentle call pulling back from the current her mind was riding without realizing. “Y-Yeah. Sorry,” she said, averting her eyes.

“You were about to move the blockade, weren’t you?” Aliana asked, concern growing on her face as she sat down beside her wife and pulled her into a hug.”

Rey accepted the hug, if partly to mask the growing shame on her face. “...I certainly wanted to,” she admitted quietly. “... I know my control isn’t really... up to snuff, but-”

“But that’s the problem,” Aliana said softly. “The last thing we want is to kill every person on those ships. And in the condition you’re in now, we can’t guarantee that you won’t.”

Rey closed her eyes tightly, feeling the threatening burn of tears beginning to well. Her hands trembled where they rested around Aliana’s waist. She found no way in which she could argue that point, which was what made it so frustrating. Ever since Crait, she had been steadily growing stronger. Strong enough to almost effortlessly resist the void’s hunger on Nathema. But that power came at a cost of control. She could barely hold her lightsaber with the Force without crushing it in her grasp. She hated it. She hated having power she couldn’t control. It made her feel like... *him* .

“...I’m sorry.”

“You don’t owe me an apology, sweetheart,” Aliana whispered. “You’ll have your control back once the Dyad is broken. But until then you need to restrain yourself. I don’t think any less of you, you know.”

Rey made a noise comparable to a sigh and a whimper, wishing she could force the welling emotion from her throat. “I know,” she said quietly. “I’m trying not to let it get to me. It’s... difficult.”

Aliana leaned in and kissed her cheek, holding her wife as tightly as she could without hurting her. Not that she could, Rey could easily lift her with one arm. “I understand. Having that much power always sounds great, but in the end the downsides are too big to handle. But it’s not like you’re useless. You’re an engineering whiz on top of being a Jedi Master.”

Rey chuckled wryly, her hand running up and down Aliana’s back. “If only I could invent a tool that can sever kriffing Dyads. Then I’d be unstoppable.”

“Well who’s to say you can’t?” Aliana smiled. “If it hasn’t been invented yet, then we don’t know if it’s possible or not.”

Rey chuckled again, leaning back to look Aliana in the eyes after she wiped her own. “I feel like most spouses would try and warn me about playing god with science,” she said with a smirk.

“Most *husbands* might, but that’s not what I am, is it?” Aliana giggled, squeezing her tighter and kissing down her neck before putting on an exaggerated sinister lilt to her voice. “Play god. It’s the Sith way.”

Rey broke out into a torrent of giggles, leaning her head back and giving Aliana more room to kiss and nibble her. “You’re impossible.”

“That’s what you love about me,” Aliana purred, her hands coming up to toy with the sash on Rey’s robes. “I’m playful and can cheer you up when you’re in a mood.”

“What did I do to deserve you?” Rey asked, her voice taking a husky tone as she leaned into Aliana’s ministrations. “You absolutely perfect woman?”

“Well I believed what you did was save my life,” Aliana giggled, kissing Rey’s cheek as her fingers slipped into her robe to stroke her toned stomach. “I should be dead inside the wreckage of a dreadnought right now. You were determined to get me out alive.”

Rey shuddered, Aliana’s touch managing to ward off the more harrowing emotions that memory brought out. Her hands gripped at her wife’s waist as she worked. “I would have snuffed out all the stars in the galaxy to keep you safe,” she whispered, her conviction accented by growing hunger.

“I know you would,” Aliana cooed softly, her fingers tracing gentle circles on Rey’s stomach. “And... for the first time in a long time, I really do feel safe.”

Rey released a breath she hadn’t realized she was holding. Something about Aliana’s words touching her in a way that not even the Force could. That now, of all times, with so many enemies on every side and having a volatile fuel cell for a wife, she still felt safe around her. “...I love you,” she choked out, burying her face in the crook of Aliana’s neck, her words muffled by the kisses she was pressing into her shoulder and collarbone.

“I love you too,” Aliana sighed wistfully as she wrapped her arms around her wife and held her close. “I promise that we’re going to beat all of this. And then everyone can go and solve their own problems, while we just find a remote planet and just... live.”

Rey smiled against Aliana’s throat, that very thought soothing her. “That day cannot get here fast enough,” she sighed blissfully.

“I know, my darling,” Aliana cooed into her ear. “Thinking about that day is what gets me through these.”

“Me too,” Rey hummed. Tilting her head slightly to look off the balcony. Not to the sky, but to the gently lit city before them. “...Although, if you were to suggest we amend those plans to try and just live here... I suppose I could get used to it.”

Aliana giggled and nodded. “If you’d rather live here than a forest planet, I’m fine with that,” she sighed happily. “Small house, though. Edge of the city.”

“Well, we shall see how things play out,” Rey mused. “Maybe this place will make me weary of people and want to just be a hermit with you for the rest of our lives.”

“I mean it is a Jedi tradition,” Aliana giggled.

Rey snickered. “Well, I can’t imagine myself growing bitter with age,” she shrugged. “Not when I have you with me. What would I have to get bitter over?”

“See, that was Skywalker’s problem,” Aliana giggled. “If he’d just found someone who would be willing to be his friend, everything would have gone so much better for him. Much to my hypothetical disappointment.”

Rey snorted. “Oh? Perhaps some fiery redhead that could fill his life with passion and make him less of an absolute pissant?”

Aliana arched her brow. “That was oddly specific. Exactly how many holodramas have you been watching?”

“Only a few!” Rey scoffed, before muttering under her breath, “dozen.”

Aliana squeaked with laughter. “You are adorable. Honestly. How is it that one woman in all of the galaxy could be so cute?”

Rey cocked a brow, smirking at her wife. “I don’t know, darling. How do *you* do it?”

Aliana gasped. “Excuse me? I’m the Dark Lady of the Sith! I’m a haunting spectre of dread and terror!”

Rey’s smirk widened. “Well the haunting spectre of dread and terror weighs less than fifty-nine kilos,” she quipped. Accentuating that point, she rose to her feet, scooping Aliana up in her arms in a single fluid motion. “And that’s *after* the mechanical leg.”

Aliana pursed her lips and narrowed her eyes at her wife. “What are you implying, *Jedi* ?”

“Me? I imply nothing,” Rey said, her grin impish at this point. “...Now, I could be *alluding* to the notion that you’re too adorable to be scary. At least to me.”

Aliana gasped again. “You take that back!”

“Oh I don’t think so,” Rey said, as she turned on her heel and carried Aliana back inside.

“This is defeminizing!” Aliana pouted, folding her arms as she slumped down in Rey’s.

Rey gave her a look of feigned sympathy. “Aw, the Dark Lady of the Sith is getting pouty.”

“You stop that!” Aliana huffed before leaning forward to kiss her wife’s cheek.

“But Alie,” Rey protested, barely able to contain her smile. “Whatever will I do with you if not talk about how cute you are?”

“Talk about how frightening I am!” Aliana grumbled.

Rey’s composure broke, trying to kiss Aliana’s neck to hide her smile. “You are the most imposing figure in all the galaxy,” she said softly, unable to keep the giggle from her voice. “Star systems quake with fear at your very presence.”

“...Thank you,” Aliana said, before wrapping her arms around Rey’s neck and kissing her cheek. “You’re really strong.”

Rey smiled as she eased herself backwards onto a bed that she could only describe as criminally luxurious. Aliana remained seated on her lap. “It helps having an adorably frightening wife I can carry around wherever I wish.”

Aliana giggled and kissed along her wife’s jawline. “It helps having my Jedi protector around while I rest.”

Rey's smile warmed considerably as she shifted further onto the massive bed, allowing them both to get situated under the covers. Without thinking, she waved a hand to dim the lights in the suite. If she hadn't been so entranced by the ruby red in Aliana's eyes, she might have felt a surge of pride in her chest. They laid in the soft, almost nonexistent lighting of their bedroom for the week. Simply looking at each other.

"...Thank you," Rey whispered.

"For what?" Aliana asked.

"For keeping me from making a horrible mistake on the balcony but also not judging me for it," Rey clarified, lifting a hand to brush a curly lock of hair away from Aliana's eyes.

"Why would I ever judge you, sweetheart?" Aliana whispered softly as she touched her cheek.

"I don't know," Rey shrugged, looking away for a moment. "It feels easy to judge myself. I figured it might be easy for you too."

Aliana shook her head. "I understand wanting to do something. And when you have the power, you feel compelled to do something even more."

"Exactly," Rey said, her voice growing wistful. "As it stands, it just feels like... like this power is wasted on me."

"It's not wasted," Aliana smiled. "Nothing is ever wasted on you. And there will come a time where we need to bring in the big guns. It's not going to be sneak attacks and stealth missions forever."

Rey felt a smile return to her face. The thought of cutting loose for a change was a tantalizing prospect. Especially against the First Order. She didn't need fine tuned control against them. She just needed her allies to give her space to work. "That will be fun," she conceded.

"On the way home, we'll stop by First Order space and crush a dreadnought," Aliana promised, kissing Rey's nose.

"You wished to see me, your Majesty?" Aliana asked as she stepped into the throne room. She was without Rey this morning, who wanted to see more of the city. Besides, it wasn't like she needed backup for a yes or no. To her surprise, however, Queen Tahraya was with her advisors as well.

"Ah, Aliana, yes," Tahraya said with a smile. "Please take a seat."

Aliana did so, finding that the Queen's warm welcome was not quite reflected in her advisors. Across the board, they looked at her with varying degrees of nervousness and distrust.

"I think that you will be pleased to know that we have come to a consensus," Tahraya began.

"That's wonderful," Aliana smiled. "Either my people will have their foothold, or at the very least I'll get to go home."

Tahraya gave a single breath of laughter before she continued. "It is after much deliberation that we have decided to accept your offer. From this day forward, Naboo and its people stand with the Republic no longer."

Aliana watched as the advisors collectively tensed at their Queen's declaration. Clearly they were less than thrilled about this turn of events, though not enough to speak out against it. "Excellent!" Aliana smiled, standing up from her seat. "Shall we get started, your Majesty?"

Tahraya looked surprised. "Started with what?"

"I promised you a cleared blockade, didn't I? And I intend to deliver," Aliana grinned as she beckoned her to follow. She led Tahraya and her advisors outside where a holoterminal was activated on the palace balcony, in full view of the blockade. "Are you reading me, 2V?"

"Yes! Shall I hail the Chancellor?" 2V asked.

"Please."

"At once, Miss Alie! Patching him through."

The holoterminal flickered and soon the visage of Villecham was before them. "...Darth Amorosa. To what do I owe the displeasure?"

"To the fact that Naboo is now under Resistance and Sith protection," Aliana explained. "I am therefore ordering you to remove your ships from orbit and return to Republic Space."

Villecham quietly leered at Aliana for a moment longer before turning his attention to the Queen. "Your majesty, does the Sith truly speak for you and your people?"

"In fact, she does," Tahraya proclaimed proudly, stepping beside Aliana. "By punishing my people and our way of life for imagined crimes, you ultimately delivered us to the one person you thought us to be conspiring with. Naboo shall not become a vassal state of your maligned Republic."

"Well unfortunately, your Majesty, the Republic doesn't take separation lightly," Villecham glared down at the Queen.

"That's irrelevant. I'm ordering you to leave. Or I'll force you too," Aliana sneered. "How do you want to play this, Villecham?"

"I don't see how you intend to forcefully remove the blockade, Amorosa," Villecham said almost dismissively. "If your fleet engages us, that will be an act of war."

"If my *fleet* engages you?"

"That's what I said, isn't it?"

Aliana only grinned and lifted her hands into the air. With a small cock of her eyebrow, she slowly started drawing her fingers together. Villecham stumbled grabbed onto his chair as panicked screams could be heard on the other side.

"We're being pulled in, Chancellor!"

In the absence of any notable Sith or Jedi, it seemed as though the Republic had forgotten what even an adept Force Sensitive could do. This wasn't quite as laborious as halting the hyperspace weapon of Starkiller base. Starships were crude matter. Cruisers could be grasped with the Force with enough focus. Guiding them down into the atmosphere, inevitably having the pull of gravity on her side, made it far less intensive. She could feel them trying to engage the thrusters, trying to

deny her pull. It was all for naught at this point. Scrambling fighters wouldn't have helped either. They weren't equipped to stop a cruiser's descent and none of them were close enough to open fire onto Theed and possibly break Aliana's concentration.

Of course, concentration was very much required for this task. She heard words of astonishment uttered by Tahraya on her right. She heard demands to cease from Villecham before her. But they were all background noise. Her focus was solely on the cruisers she was pulling out of the sky. The silhouette of the cruisers were quickly visible against the clouds as they breached the atmosphere. Aliana had the entire fleet in a death-spiral that only she could get them out of.

"Okay! Okay!" Villecham yelled. "We'll pull out of orbit!"

Aliana opened her palms and the ships stopped growing in the distance. "Oh?" she said almost playfully. The halt caused a recoil that sent Villecham lunging the other way, much to her amusement.

"Yes!" Villecham confirmed, scrambling to get back into his seat. "We'll lift the damn blockade!"

"How wonderful," Aliana drawled, gently pushing on the ships with the Force and lifting them back out of the atmosphere and into orbit. "Now that wasn't so hard, was it?"

The Supreme Chancellor grunted with exertion and exasperation as he righted himself, glaring daggers at Aliana. "You just threatened the life of the Chancellor and hundreds of Republic soldiers, Amorosa. Consider your pardon from the Republic null and void at this point."

"Well it's a good thing I was never planning to return to Republic space," Aliana smirked, flicking her fingers at Villecham. "Be on your way, Chancellor. And say 'thank you, Lady Amorosa, for sparing my life.'"

Villecham cut the communication. In the horizon, Aliana could see the cruiser beginning to right itself and fly upwards. It barely left the atmosphere before they made the jump to hyperspace.

"...Incredible," Tahraya said breathlessly. "...I heard the stories, but... I never considered a single person with the Force could be so... exceptional!"

"Exceptional?" Aliana turned around. "That was nothing. A lot of Force users can do that. Your Senator has done that."

Tahraya blinked, turning an incredulous gaze to Marek. The old man shrugged. "Well, it's been a long time since such a feat was ever required of me. I can see why that's fallen out of public memory."

"Tahraya, before Marek was a Senator, he was actually a very accomplished Sith Lord," Aliana smiled. "It's why I refer to him as Lord Starkiller."

"Well, I don't believe I'm even a Senator anymore," Marek said with a wry grin. "Looks like I will have to see what is open for me in the job market."

Tahraya scoffed. "Marek, you speak as if I have not already readied the paperwork for your next assignment."

Aliana giggled. “Looks like the Queen wants to keep you around, Lord Starkiller. Much like how I like to keep Rey around,” she smirked wickedly.

Marek blinked, his gaze alternating between Aliana and Tahraya. “Oh. Oh, no. Your Majesty, I assure you. I am not bold enough for such an... assignment.”

Tahraya sighed. “I believe the Lord Amorosa was simply teasing you, Marek. Not that you aren’t rather fetching for your age. No, I am going to need you by my side in the days to come. We have marked an unprecedented era in our people’s history. I’ll need every capable hand I can trust to help us through this.”

Aliana turned away with a smile and pulled out her comlink. “Talon?”

“Yes, my Lady,” Talon replied.

“Bring the fleet into position. A light patrol around Naboo at all times. This is now the Fleet’s staging ground to assault the First Order on the front,” she ordered. “Set ships down outside the city, try to disturb the Naboo as little as possible.”

“Understood. Pulling out of Hyperspace in about thirty clicks,” Talon responded.

“...Lord Amorosa,” one of the advisors chimed, sounding considerably skittish. “You... understand that there will have to be an... adjustment period before Naboo can contribute to this war, yes?”

“We’re not asking you to contribute to the war,” Aliana explained. “Only provide a foothold for the fleet. A place to refuel and repair. A place where my people can buy food and supplies.”

“We can certainly accommodate that, Aliana,” Tahraya said with a smile. “A chance to trade with those from the Outer Rim will likely create bold new opportunities for our people.”

“Indeed,” Aliana grinned. “If you’ll excuse me, your Highness, I have to find my wife and tell her the good news.”

“Before you’re prepared to leave, I have one favor to ask,” Tahraya smiled. “There’s a Senator that will need to be delivered back to his homeworld. Now that we are no longer with the Republic, we cannot call a Republic shuttle to collect him.”

Aliana nodded. “I can take him. Which Senator and where’s he going?”

“Dantooine,” Tahraya said. “Senator Yensin Tiralli.”

In an instant, all the color drained from Aliana’s face. *‘Oh,’* she thought. *‘My father...’*

Break the Galaxy in Half

“Chancellor, you shouldn’t have been blockading Naboo in the first place!” Leia yelled at the projection of Chancellor Villecham. It had been a long afternoon. Rey and Aliana’s report on the situation in Naboo had come in an hour before Villecham’s angry holocall. The news about Naboo was surprising, but the blockade even more so. That the Republic sanctioned something so heinous was an outrage among the Resistance. “The Queen has every right to seek allies and push back! You blockaded the planet for a crime they didn’t commit without even a trial for Queen Tahraya! What do you expect me to do about it?!”

“I expect you to hand the Sith over for prosecution,” Villecham demanded. “She incited sedition and attacked a Republic official.”

“She came to the aid of a planet in distress! You’re the one who was openly hostile,” Leia bit back. “That was an illegal blockade! You’re lucky she didn’t have her fleet blast you out of the sky! She was practically merciful!”

“Organa,” Villecham growled. “I don’t know where this new protective attitude came from, but I don’t like it. I already didn’t like the fact that you were working with a Sith Lord, but this is inexcusable. After Palpatine-”

“Chancellor, Palpatine was a scheming old man who played the Republic to get what he wanted,” Leia said, cutting across him entirely. “Amorosa is barely an adult, and she’s almost been killed countless times just for existing in the wrong person’s vicinity. My own brother attacked her when she was just a little girl! I’m not going to be part of this distracting witch hunt anymore. I shouldn’t have been part of it from the start. The girl’s been through enough hell for one lifetime.”

Villecham narrowed his eyes at her. “I see... I should have suspected this ever since your election campaign.”

“...What?” Leia asked, already knowing where Villecham was going with this.

“Your father, a Sith Lord? Your son, Supreme Leader? I should have known you’d side with the Sith,” Villecham spat.

Leia glared daggers at Villecham. “If it weren’t for that Sith, you’d have been blasted into oblivion Villecham. She saved the lives of millions of people, and you’ve done a piss poor job showing your gratitude! Do you have any idea how badly you’ve alienated the last of the Jedi doing this?!”

“A Jedi that’s fallen to the Dark Side,” Villecham countered.

“If you believe that, you truly are a fool,” Leia spat. “I’m not going to help you hurt those girls, Villecham. That’s the end of it.”

And with that, she shut off the holocall.

Aliana’s actions on Naboo hadn’t necessarily burned all bridges with the Republic as she’d thought it would. Not killing anyone probably helped, but the curse of Democracy had come back to bite Villecham on the ass. Not only had the blockade been heavily contested, but Republic opinion

toward the Resistance and the Sith was also heavily contested. It was a moment of clarity for Aliana that she didn't need the Chancellor's favor to keep the Republic off her back, or even that of a majority of Senators. She just needed *enough*.

And technically returning a Senator safely to Republic Space would go a long way to maintaining the wedge in the Senate that she needed. She just wished it wasn't *this* one.

"I thank you again for your hospitality, Lady Amorosa," Tiralli smiled as Aliana brought out soup for him, Rey and herself.

"Think nothing of it," Aliana said tersely as she set the bowls down on the table. "Please."

"It's hard to do that," Tiralli said somewhat frankly before taking a careful sip of soup and humming with approval. "Ever since making your acquaintance, it's become more clear that your reputation among some circles of the Senate is... woefully exaggerated."

"Well I've also heard that Dantooine isn't making many friends in the Senate either," Aliana scoffed. "I wonder what the common element is there?"

Tiralli chuckled at that. "Whatever indeed."

Rey looked up from her soup, arching a curious brow. "Wait, I don't follow."

"I'll tell you later dear," Aliana smirked, dangerously close to cooing over the innocence her wife was exhibiting.

"So I'm afraid I never got either of your names," Tiralli said with a smile. "Probably should have asked before asking for a lift."

"Just Lady Amorosa will do," Aliana said.

"Rey Beniko," Rey smiled back.

"Ah, I s-" Tiralli blinked, his smile falling slightly as he turned a curious look to Rey. "...I'm sorry, did you say Rey *Beniko*?"

Rey nodded in affirmation. "Yes I did. Why do you ask?"

"I knew someone with that name," Tiralli said quietly as he dropped his spoon into his soup. "Someone who... was very close to me, before she disappeared."

Aliana looked away, quietly eating her soup as she tried to think of a way to leave.

"Really?" Rey quirked a brow. "Is it a common name?"

"Not to my knowledge," Tiralli explained. "Before today I only ever knew one woman to have ever had it."

Aliana busied herself with her soup and tried to avoid eye contact with the both of them.

"Well in truth, my last name-" Rey was cut off by Aliana coughing loudly and shooting her a glare. "...What's the matter with you?" She asked.

“Nothing,” Aliana said, sitting upright and keeping her eyes focused on her wife. “Nothing at all. It’s like I just said, *Lady Amorosa is fine* .”

Rey furrowed her brow, looking puzzled at Aliana for a moment. When her gaze was met with just more glaring, she turned her attention back to Tiralli. “Well, Senator. Who exactly was this other Beniko. Perhaps I might know them?”

“I don’t know,” Tiralli said, looking at Rey carefully. “You don’t much look like her.”

“Try me,” Rey shrugged.

“Fine,” Tiralli sighed. “Tahleea Beniko. A freight runner who used to work with the Republic until her disappearance about ten years ago.”

Aliana groaned quietly and rubbed her eyes. “ *Please stop talking,* ” she said in Ancient Sith.

Rey frowned at her wife. “*Why?*” she asked. “*What’s wrong? He just said that T-*” Her somewhat clunky grasp on the Sith dialect trailed off as her eyes widened with sudden realization. Her suddenly dumbstruck gaze flickered between Aliana and Tiralli for a moment.

The senator noticed the sudden tension in the air, a trickle of worry seeping into his expression. “Is... something the matter?”

Rey looked back to Tiralli. “...N-No, of course not,” she shook her head. “Al- ...Amorosa just told me that... she thought she heard the engine making a funny noise.” Hastily, she rose up to her feet, almost knocking over the soup in the process. “Darling, perhaps you could... give me a hand?”

“Sure,” Aliana nodded, standing up as well.

The two of them rushed out of the lounge and into the engine room, where Rey grabbed her by the shoulders and slammed her into the wall. “What’s going on?” she whispered harshly.

“That’s my father!” Aliana hissed.

“Your fath-!?” Rey bit back the rest of that question, not trusting herself to speak it at an outrageous volume. “That Republic Senator is your father?” she asked through gritted teeth. “Isn’t that something I should have known before we left!?”

“I’m sorry! My father isn’t exactly a regular topic of conversation and this ferry job was kinda dropped in my lap!” Aliana said, pushing Rey off of her. “The point is that things like this is why I tell you not to give everyone my real name!”

“Marek introduced me to the Senate as Rey Beniko!” Rey argued, still struggling to keep her voice down. “I thought this wasn’t a big deal!”

“Well I think it’s worth pointing out that we weren’t married then, so you could have told them you didn’t have a last name,” Aliana said, pacing back and forth between the engines. “The point is that you were about to tell him that your last name was actually mine, and that’s a big no no with Senators!”

Rey’s frown deepened as she pinched the bridge of her nose. “...Okay. Okay. So, obviously, he doesn’t know about you. Does he... know about your mother? That she was Sith?”

“No, he doesn’t,” Aliana explained. “My mother kept that, and me, a secret from him.”

“I thought he said they were close,” Rey countered.

“Hey I didn’t tell *you* at first, either,” Aliana huffed. “My mother never got the chance to come clean to him. She was murdered before she could.”

“But why not tell him when she was pregnant with-” Rey’s sentence trailed off with a sigh of exasperation. The Jedi was pacing the floor of the engine room at this point. “...Alright. So... what do we do now? Just... not say anything?”

“That was kind of the idea, wasn’t it?” Aliana said. “Just don’t say anything, drop him off, forget this ever happened.”

“Alright, well next time, please find a moment to take me aside and just tell me what is going on instead of just expecting me to pick up on context clues, Alie,” Rey said, a little indignant. “I’m not exactly the most socially adept. Jakku was not a high society planet!”

“Okay, fine,” Aliana sighed. “This was all kinda shoved in my face. I didn’t think I’d ever have to be in the same room with him. I mean, it’s kind of a big galaxy.”

“Well, fair enough,” Rey conceded, her shoulders relaxing slightly. The hum of the hyperdrive filled the air between them for a moment before she chose to speak again. “How long until we reach Dantooine again?”

“A few days,” Aliana said, sitting down on a deactivated console. “Give or take a day depending on fuel.”

Rey frowned, looking out the door to the rest of the ship. “Seems like a long time to try and cover this up,” she said with a grimace. “At this point we might just want to tell him.”

Aliana’s head bolted up. “What?!” she balked.

“I mean, think about it,” Rey said. “We had all but expected to burn our bridges with the Republic at this point. This guy knowing you’re his daughter isn’t really going to change anything. There’s very little to actually lose here, and... best case scenario, something to gain.”

“Rey, I’ve had no relationship with the man my entire life,” Aliana remarked. “Not once in the last ten years did I even bother trying to get in touch with him.”

“Why? Is he abusive or something?” Rey asked.

“No, according to my mother he was fine,” Aliana shrugged. “I just... didn’t want to.”

Rey lips pursed into a thin line. A part of her, a very young, very unlearned part of her wanted to chide Aliana for knowing she had a parent out there but wanting nothing to do with them. Alas, she had seen enough of the galaxy to know better than to berate her wife for that. Especially with how her own parents turned out to be. She and Alie were not the same people. She couldn’t fault her for doing something she wouldn’t have done. “Well... If you still don’t want anything to do with him after this, you can say so,” Rey offered. “I just think it would be better for everyone to try and clear the air rather than just try and keep up a lie for days.”

“But Rey, if I tell him and then say I don’t want anything to do with him, I’m just a massive schutta!” Aliana balked. “I mean I am still being kind of a schutta but this time without the guilt!”

Rey groaned. “...I mean, I guess. But, he already knows *my* last name. He obviously knows something’s up. I just don’t know how many questions I can take before I crack.”

Aliana groaned as well and slid off the console. “That’s right. You’re terrible at lying. You just had to be a Jedi, didn’t you?” she said with a tiny air of mirth, moving close to hug her wife.

Rey accepted the hug with no shortage of relief. It was reassuring to have Aliana close again after having an argument. They were few and far between these days, but that didn’t make her hate it any less to have them. “Well, if you want me to be a Jedi about it, I could try and mind trick the questions away,” she offered. “But with my power the way it is, I think I might just wipe his entire brain by accident.”

“Oh kriff, that’s right. We need to get you a project. Building a ship or something.” She pulled away and rubbed her eyes again. At this point she was going to rub then redder than they already were. “...Alright. Guess I don’t really have a choice in the matter. It’ll be less of a disaster if we do it now than if it happens by accident.”

Rey looked at her wife with concern. “Alright, as long as you’re sure,” she said. “This is your situation, so we’ll handle this your way. I promise.”

“Well handling this my way would be to say nothing at all and seal you in our quarters for the rest of the trip,” she chuckled. “But that’s not an option, is it? So I guess... I gotta have the uncomfortable conversation. Baby steps though. Let’s... tell him what happened to my mother first.”

Rey winced slightly. “Oh, that’s gonna be a hell of a baby step.”

Aliana nodded. “Which is why you’re staying close,” Aliana said, taking Rey’s hand and holding it tightly, before pulling her back out into the lounge.

Tiralli looked up as they returned and smiled. “Welcome back. Everything alright with the engines?”

Aliana sat down and took a deep breath, channeling the Dark Side to quell her anxiety. “Senator... you said you knew Tahleea Beniko?”

Tiralli nodded, his expression sobering slightly. “Yes I did. We were very close and worked together on the formation of the New Republic. She’d be... appalled at the way all her work has gone to waste in the last ten years.”

“So what do you know of her disappearance?” Aliana asked.

Tiralli looked down at the table. “...Not a great deal, I’m afraid,” he admitted. “She took work that sent her out to the mid and outer rim and... I never saw her again. We managed a regular correspondence for a time, but... it didn’t last.”

Rey turned to give Aliana a worried look, shifting closer in her seat so that their legs made contact. A small gesture of reassurance. “How did you lose contact?” Aliana asked.

“Well one day she just... stopped responding,” Tiralli shrugged. “She effectively ghosted me. I always wondered what I’d done to warrant that.”

Aliana shook her head. “You didn’t do anything. Tahleea didn’t ghost you. She was murdered.”

Tiralli looked back up, his eyes wide with shock and disbelief. “...Murdered?” he said quietly, almost breathlessly.

Aliana nodded. “She took a job on Corellia delivering fuel rods, and stopped to train her apprentice,” Aliana explained. “They were attacked by Luke Skywalker and Ben Solo. They killed her.”

Tiralli’s brow furrowed deeply, looking even more lost than he did a moment ago. “...But... Tahleea worked for the betterment of the Republic. She dedicated so much of herself to it. Why would a Jedi... that makes no sense!”

“That’s because Tahleea Beniko was also Darth Mayrik, the Dark Lady of the Sith,” Aliana explained, bracing herself.

Tiralli’s eyes widened again, his jaw nearly falling slack. For a long while, he didn’t say anything, his gaze unfocused as he was lost in the information he was just blindsided with. “You... you’re sure?” he asked.

Aliana nodded. “I saw it with my own eyes. *I* was the apprentice she was training,” Aliana explained, her eyes welling up with tears that she hastily wiped away. “She died ensuring that I got away from that fight alive. She stretched herself very thin protecting me, and... they were able to kill her.”

“Her *apprentice* ?” Trailli asked, still appearing nonplussed as his gaze shifted between Aliana and Rey.

“If you doubt our word, we have plenty of archived holorecordings detailing Tahleea’s work as a Sith,” Rey supplied.

“I... do not doubt your words,” Tiralli insisted. “It’s just... a great deal to take in all at once.”

Aliana nodded as she took a spoonful of her now cold soup. “It’s alright. You can take your time. But... there is more, unfortunately.”

Tiralli nodded, his attention turned to the bowl he had just managed to empty in their absence. There was a brief respite of quiet as Aliana and Rey patiently waited for him to process what he just heard. In truth, Alie needed that time to steel herself for what was still to come. “...Alright,” Tiralli said, looking back up at them. “So, Tahleea was a Sith Lord, your former master and Master Skywalker killed her. Does that mean her work with the Republic was... a sham?”

Aliana shook her head. “She really did believe that the Republic could be better. And she loved her friends dearly. She wanted to bring the Sith into the Republic properly, as allies. There was no secret plan. She just wanted to live with her family.”

Tiralli blinked. “...Her *family* ?” His gaze shifted to Rey. “...That would be you?”

Rey’s lips pressed into a thin line as she shook her head.

“Then who-” Tiralli trailed off as his eyes drifted back to Aliana.

Aliana, for her part, nodded. “I wasn’t just her apprentice,” she said quietly, clutching her mug of juri juice and taking a deep breath. “I’m her daughter.”

Both women watched as realization dawned on the senator’s face. His expression was almost serene in how gobsmacked he appeared. “...By the stars,” he said quietly, managing to break the stunned silence he was in.

Aliana nodded, averting her gaze. “Yeah, it’s an especially painful memory.”

“You... had to watch your own mother die?” Tiralli balked.

“Not die. Being murdered,” Aliana corrected. Over the years she’d become quiet adamant about emphasizing the difference between the two.

“How... old were you?” Tiralli asked.

“Fourteen.”

Tiralli’s sucked in a breath, his expression one of abject horror. “I... am so sorry,” he said quietly. “I cannot imagine what that must have been like.”

“It’s fine,” Aliana said. It wasn’t, of course. Aliana was still haunted by her mother’s murder to this very day. It was an extremely sensitive issue for her, and had a deeply profound impact on her. It was the reason she hated the Republic, and wanted nothing to do with them.

“You... didn’t grow up alone, did you?” Tiralli asked. “Your... your father was there for you, right?”

This was it. Aliana took a shaking breath and shook her head. “My father didn’t know about me.”

“He didn’t?” Tiralli asked, his curiosity cutting through the incredulity for a moment. “Who was h-” The last piece clicked in his mind before he even finished the question. Aliana and Rey both saw it clear as day on his face.

Aliana reached under the table and grabbed Rey’s hand. She needed her wife’s touch right now. This wasn’t even something she wanted to do, she just accepted that it was better than letting it get out another way. Like... the last time. “I’m sorry Senator, I know this probably isn’t what you wanted to hear on a simple ferry ride,” she explained.

“...Oh, my god,” Tiralli said quietly, too stunned to speak any louder. “...I have a daughter.”

Aliana nodded, doing her damndest to keep herself composed. Rey’s touch helped, but the nerves were still there.

“I... how old are you?” Tiralli asked.

“Twenty four,” Aliana said, threading her fingers with Rey. “I turn twenty-five in a few weeks.”

Tiralli’s eyes widened slightly before he let out a small breath and rested his chin against his hand. “...Yes. Yes, that about tracks,” he said quietly to himself. “That lines up too well. That was around the last I ever saw her.”

Aliana nodded. "She kept me secret from everyone in the Republic. Called me Star so nobody would know my name, and it quickly became an affectionate nickname," she said, squeezing Rey's hand tighter. "She was terrified of anything happening to me, so she cut contact with almost everyone except you and Mon Mothma."

"Oh. Mothma." Tiralli frowned slightly. "Did... she know?"

"I told her in her final moments," Aliana said firmly. "She might have been my mother's friend, but she came after me and my people despite our willingness to work with the Republic. I don't regret putting her down."

"...Okay," Tiralli nodded, his gaze turned downward for a moment. "I... kriffing hell, I honestly don't know what to say right now."

"You don't need to say anything," Aliana said, staring down at her soup. "You wanted to know what happened to Tahleea, I told you. There isn't anything more to it than that."

"But... there *is* more," Tiralli argued. "A great deal more! What does this mean about you and I?"

"Nothing really," Aliana shrugged, still not meeting his eyes. "We go our separate ways and carry on as usual. Simple as that." She didn't see the look her words brought to Tiralli's face, but she heard it in his next words.

"...Oh." He spoke that, not with heartbreak. It was far too soon for such a connection to be formed. Disappointment perhaps? Sadness certainly. Soft spoken, but certainly potent. Aliana didn't look up. She couldn't. She could hear what her word had done, and she couldn't even look at him. Even Rey's comforting touch wasn't enough to settle the guilt. She felt queasy even just sitting there.

"Sweetheart," Rey said softly, reaching out to rub her back in small circles. "Sweetheart, I really think you need to look up."

Aliana shook her head, pulling her hand out of Rey's and folding them on the table.

"Sweetheart," Rey continued, her voice more insistent. "You really should-"

"It's alright," Tiralli said, an undeniable crack in his voice as he rose from his seat. Aliana wished she couldn't hear the sound of moisture as he wiped at his eyes. But she did. "I... understand. It's just... a great deal at once, you know."

Aliana nodded. "It was a lot for me when I was asked to take you back to Republic Space," she said quietly.

Tiralli was quiet for a moment. "...I am sorry, Lady Amorosa. I didn't mean to cause you any discomfort by agreeing to this."

"You didn't know," Aliana shrugged. "It's fine."

"Alie, look at him," Rey said softly.

Tiralli's eyes widened slightly. "What did you say?"

Aliana winced and lifted her eyes to meet her father's gaze. "My name is Aliana," she said with a sigh.

Tiralli looked surprised, but in a more pensive manner than earlier. "...Aliana," he said softly. "...We talked about that name." When Rey's brow furrowed in confusion, he continued. "Tahleea and I. We were discussing children one night. I said... Aliana is the name I would want for my daughter."

Aliana winced and stood up. "I'm sorry, I can't do this," she said, before bolting for her quarters. The door slid shut behind her, and a red light activated above signalling that it was locked. Not even Rey could get in.

Rey tried to follow after, but was not quick enough. All she could do was turn to look at Tiralli, her expression apologetic. "...It's alright," he insisted, taking a moment to adjust his clothes. "This must have been difficult for her to talk about. I won't press the matter."

Rey felt a twinge of guilt as she looked at the door. "...Unfortunately, I *did* press the matter." Tiralli frowned slightly in response and she continued. "I wanted for you both to sort through things in a controlled environment. I didn't want her to have another... I think I pushed her too hard on this."

"Yes, you did," Tiralli nodded. "If she didn't want to talk about any of this, you should have respected that. I can't even begin to imagine what she's been through, but it's obvious that she's *still* going through it."

"I know," Rey said, her head all but hung low in shame. "I am really sorry, Senator. I shouldn't have gotten you roped into this."

"It's not me you owe an apology to," Tiralli said, standing up and sighing. "...How many times has something like this happened?"

Rey's lips pressed into a thin line. "...A handful of times," she admitted shamefully. "I... didn't react well when I first found out that Alie was a Sith."

"What did you-?"

"I'd rather not talk about it," Rey said firmly. "I regret what I did and I've been trying to do better since then."

"Well, coercing her into doing *this* isn't the way to go about it," Tiralli frowned.

"I'm sorry, I... I thought you'd want to know your daughter," Rey sighed in concession.

"And I did. But for whatever reason, she didn't want to know me," Tiralli explained. "Look... has she ever been to a therapist?"

Rey frowned. "No, she hasn't. Before this war, she spent her entire life on the run. There wasn't time for such things."

"Well it sounds like she might need to," Tiralli said. "I don't need to know her history to know she's been through a lot that she hasn't dealt with. Watching her own mother die... by the Force, that had to have been horrifying. I'm not certain you really understand, but that sort of trauma can break a person completely."

Rey looked back at the locked door, a painful churning in her stomach caused by the thought of Alie... breaking. "...I'll talk to her about it," she said, looking back at the Senator. "You have my

word.”

“Good,” Tiralli nodded. “I know you want to help your wife, but you need to accept that she’s dealing with things that you just can’t fix on your own. Tell her if she wants to talk to someone, I know a professional who could come out to Odessen to talk to her.”

“I’ll be sure to relay that to her,” Rey said, Tiralli’s words doing little to settle the churning. Looking back to the door, seeing that it was still locked. It made her feel helpless. Like all she could do was just sit on her hands and wait for Alie to come out or let her in. She needed to do something. Something to busy her mind and not let her dwell on the guilt that couldn’t serve a functional purpose until she could talk to her wife.

“...If you don’t mind, Senator,” Rey said, walking passed him. “I’ll be in the workshop. I need to keep my hands busy with something.”

“Of course,” Tiralli nodded. “It’s your ship, after all.”

Aliana emerged from her quarters a few hours later. She was a mess. Her hair was all over the place, her mascara was running down her cheeks, and her eyeshadow was smudged. She’d gone from crying, to moping, to just laying on her bed staring at the ceiling before the growling in her stomach told her she needed to get up. She entered the lounge hoping to find 2V and ask him for something to eat, when the voice of Tiralli rang out.

“Hi,” he said softly, looking up from his datapad and pointing to a tray with tea and a few sandwiches on it. “You never finished your dinner. I figured you’d be hungry eventually.”

The emotional dread returned, but at this point it was just a dull throb. Alie had all but exhausted herself in her fit of anxiety induced weeping. At this point, the dread she felt in his presence was bearable. Enough so that she sat down across from him and accepted the tray. “Thanks,” she said, her throat slightly raspy. She looked around as she took a sip of the tea, which was admittedly soothing. “Where’s Rey?”

“In the workshop,” Tiralli said. “I don’t think she’s quite aware of how much time has passed from in there.”

“She never is. When she’s working, she’ll miss meals if I don’t go get her,” Aliana sighed.

“...If you don’t mind my asking,” Tiralli said. “The two of you have the same name...”

“She’s my wife.”

“Ah, I see. She took yours then.”

“She didn’t have a last name when I met her,” Aliana continued after another indulgent sip. “She was a scavenger on Jakku most of her life. Her parents sold her into slavery when she was a child.”

Tiralli’s eyes widened. “By the Force... so she...”

“Grew up without a family,” Aliana nodded. “Her family were deadbeats who sold her for beer money. Now *I’m* her family.”

Tiralli looked down the hall of the ship where he could hear whirring and sizzling filter through the durasteel door to the workshop. “Well, I suppose that would explain her lack in social graces.”

Aliana narrowed her eyes slightly. “Watch it. I don’t take kindly to people insulting my wife.”

Tiralli winced slightly. “My apologies. I didn’t mean anything by it. Just that she seems better with technology than, you know, people.”

Aliana sighed and took another sip. “Well it was how we met. Ship was broken, and I needed someone to fix it. She was there, and had the parts I needed.”

Tiralli responded with a small huff of laughter. “It is nice being close to someone that’s good with that sort of thing,” he said. “My hands have always been too clumsy for ship repair.”

Aliana laughed humorlessly. “I can’t even look at the control console on my ship without all the buttons bleeding together. If it’s not a lightsaber I need a guide.”

Tiralli joined in on the laughter before silence hung over them again. Aliana busied herself with eating the sandwiches while the Senator took sparing glances at his datapad. It wasn’t exactly comfortable silence, but the awkward tension was not unbearable. Then he chose to speak again. “...Are you going to be alright?”

Aliana huffed. “I haven’t been alright in ten years. I’ve been on the run that entire time, wandering the Outer Rim.”

“Rey told me about that,” Tiralli said, frowning deeply. “I can’t imagine what you’ve had to go through all those years by yourself.”

“You mean besides doing shady jobs to get by and nearly being killed by the people who are now my allies?” Aliana scoffed. “It’s been a regular vacation. It’s amazing. It’s the best time.”

Tiralli averted his gaze, his hands laid somewhat restlessly in her lap. “...I understand that it’s none of my concern,” he began. “But perhaps it would do you some good to seek some help sorting through everything that’s happened to you in the last ten years.”

“I’ll pass,” Aliana said, sipping her tea again. “I’m not really all that chatty about my life if I can help it. Besides, I don’t know many shrinks who are down for picking the brain of the Sith Lord.”

“I know a few,” Tiralli said without missing a beat. “They’re acclaimed, understanding, and unmatched in being able to keep confidences.”

“The answer is no, Senator,” Aliana said, more firmly this time. She set her tea down and pulled her legs up to her chest.

The Senator frowned deeper. Now that he was looking for it, he could see that Aliana inherited a considerable amount of stubbornness from her mother. Alas, with the way she was curling into herself, that stubbornness was undercut by a very clear vulnerability. It tugged at his instinct to try and press the matter, even though pushing this already distressed young woman was the last thing he wanted. “Alright,” he nodded in concession. “But, the offer is there if you ever decide to take it.”

Aliana took a deep breath and nodded. “...Thank you, Senator,” she whispered.

“Of course,” Tiralli nodded, a small smile gracing his lined face. His eyes caught a glint of light and cast down to Aliana’s cybernetic leg. “...Dare I ask about that?”

“Kylo Ren,” Aliana explained. “On board the Supremacy. Cut off my leg and impaled me through the midsection.”

Tiralli sucked air through his teeth. “By the stars. That must have been awful.”

“Was in a coma for months,” Aliana continued before taking another bite of a sandwich. “Imagine my surprise when I came to and found out I was on Coruscant. Not a fun time.”

Tiralli winced and shook his head. “By the Force, did a black dire cat cross your path or something?”

“Nope. I crossed *everyone*’s path,” Aliana snickered. “That’s kind of what happens when you’re a Sith in this galaxy.”

The Senator’s lips pursed into a thin line as a line of questioning ran through his mind. “I am surprised you still stuck to that philosophy with how much trouble it’s gotten you.”

“Yeah, I’m sure you and the rest of the Republic would like that,” Aliana said with a shrug. “Give up being a Sith, convert to a Jedi and conform like a good Republic pawn.”

“Well, not even become a Jedi,” Tiralli insisted. “Just being so unapologetically Sith just seems a little... reckless? I mean, I never even knew Tahleea was a Sith. She carried herself like the best and brightest of the Republic. As gentle and peace-loving as the late Senator Amidala.”

“And the Jedi killed her anyway,” Aliana scowled.

The silence that followed nearly made her ears ring.

She felt a familiar surge of guilt run through her, and she stared down at her knees. “...Look, I’m sorry if you were expecting something different to happen after learning who I was. I just... it just feels too much like replacing my Mom.”

“I understand,” Tiralli said softly. “I would never ask you to think of it in such a way, but I understand. No one could replace your mother. She was... remarkable.”

At the praise of her mother, a realization hit her. “...I’m sorry, this must be hard for you too...”

“You think?” Tiralli said with a shrug. “I just found out today that the woman I loved was not only dead, but that she’d been murdered. And that we had a daughter I never knew about. I’m... handling it as best as I can.”

Aliana wiped her eyes and stared at the tray. “...What was she like? Before I was born?”

Tiralli blinked, looking mildly surprised by the question. “...She was incredible,” he said plainly, his tone wistful. “Unlike any woman I had ever met in my life before or since. She was brilliant, resourceful, generous to a fault and just so damned passionate in everything she did. On the day I met her, I saw her just give her jacket and a thousand credits to an absolute stranger. The ideas she had for Republic reform have been the foundation of my public policies for years. If she had the stomach for open politics, she could have easily run for Chancellor.”

Aliana huffed. “She loved democracy. Can you imagine her identity coming out then?”

Tiralli couldn’t help but laugh. “I can imagine the entire Senate dying of shock on the spot,” he responded. “I know it would throw me for a loop to say the least.”

“Sith Chancellor. And this time it would be better,” Aliana snickered. “Not to brag, but Beniko Sith are of a higher class than Bane Sith.”

“Really?” Tiralli inquired, leaning forward in his seat and looking at Aliana with genuine intrigue. “What exactly is the difference? I’m curious.”

“Well for one, we don’t expect our apprentices to kill us,” Aliana explained. “We nurture and love them like our own. Actually so far in every case, they *were* our own. Being Sith runs in my family. It has for thousands of years.”

“I thought the idea of the Sith was that there were only ever two,” Tiralli reasoned. “Was that just a rule that these ‘Bane Sith’ manufactured?”

“Absolutely,” Aliana nodded. “When you have a religion as ancient and deeply rooted in the idea of personal freedom as the Sith, it is impossible to centralize. The Bane line just envisioned themselves as the only true Sith.”

“Interesting,” Tiralli nodded. “So what have you been doing all that time?”

“Just getting by,” Aliana nodded. “My ancestors did the whole saving the galaxy thing, and we’ve just been a long-lasting family since then. It’s how we stayed out of galactic history.”

“Fascinating,” Tiralli mused. “Do your core beliefs differ from the Bane line as well?”

Aliana shrugged. “I can’t really say I have core beliefs. It’s more just what I’ve learned as I’ve grown up. I know old Sith philosophy, but I’ve formed my own path since then.”

“Have you any ambitions?” Tiralli asked further. “Something to work towards with all you’ve learned?”

Aliana’s gaze turned toward the direction of the workshop, where they could still hear Rey working. “...I’ve already got it.”

Tiralli followed Aliana’s gaze, a knowing look on his face. “Ah. I see. She really is that special, hm?”

“She means everything to me,” Aliana said, leaning slightly in the direction of the workshop. “She’s the first person I let into my life since my mom was murdered.”

“She mentioned things between you both were rocky for a time,” Tiralli replied. “I take it things are better now?”

Aliana nodded. “A lot better. She... she gives me hope that things might eventually be... good.”

The Senator offered a small hum of understanding, on the verge of saying something else when he noticed the busywork behind the closed door suddenly ceased. A moment later, the door opened, with Rey stepping outside wiping the sweat from her brow. As she walked out onto the deck, she was suddenly aware of Aliana’s presence outside her room and almost immediately rushed to her

side. Tiralli almost felt whiplash simply witnessing her move so fast. “Alie!” she exclaimed, already at her side. “Hey. How are you feeling? Are you okay?”

“Ask me that again and look into my eyes,” Aliana said dryly, wrapping her arms around Rey’s shoulders and hugging her tightly.

Rey accepted the hug, burying her face in Aliana’s hair. Despite the fact that she managed to keep herself busy, she was feeling the effect of her wife’s absence more acutely now that she was holding her again. “...*I’m sorry*,” she said, her ancient Sith almost lost in the way she mumbled those words in Aliana’s hair. “*I shouldn’t have pushed you. That was wrong of me.*”

Aliana squeezed her wife as hard as she could and nuzzled into her neck. “*Thank you. That means a lot, Rey.*”

“*I promised you things would be better,*” Rey said, her soft voice filled with conviction. “*I meant it. I want to be good for you.*”

Aliana pulled back enough to kiss Rey’s cheek. “Thank you.”

Rey mewled slightly, resting her forehead against Aliana’s for a moment as she just drank in her wife’s presence as though she was dying of thirst in Jakku’s deserts. “I love you, Alie.”

“I love you too,” Aliana whispered, wrapping her arms around Rey’s shoulders and letting her eyes drift closed. “Please. Just... don’t do that again.”

“I won’t,” Rey promised. “Never again.”

Aliana sighed in relief and kissed her cheek again. “C’mon. Sit with me. I missed being in your arms.”

Rey acted without another word, pulling Aliana close as she sat beside her. It took everything within her not to pull her wife into her lap and press flush against her. It was important to remember they technically had a guest. A guest that was watching them both with an approving smile. Aliana melted into her wife’s arms and snuggled up under her chin. After an entire afternoon spent warding off flashbacks in her quarters alone, she desperately needed the comfort that Rey offered. Her work tunic smelled like smoke, likely having been singed by sparks from her welding. There was also the tiniest hint of engine oil around her. It was comforting.

“I love you,” she murmured again, wrapping her arms tightly around her waist.

“I love you too,” Rey purred before pressing a kiss to her wife’s head. “All I want is for you to be okay.”

Aliana’s eyes widened slightly, and she looked up at her. “...Really?”

“Really,” Rey nodded, lifting a hand to caress Aliana’s cheek. Their gazes locked. Rey almost wished that she could drown in the red pools in her eyes. “Nothing is more important to me than that.”

Aliana slowly glanced at Tiralli. “Could you... give us a minute?” Tiralli nodded, and departed without another word to his temporary quarters. As soon as she was certain that Tiralli was gone,

she lunged forward and kissed Rey deeply. "I want to start a family with you," she whispered against her lips.

Rey's breath hitched as she attempted to get air into her lungs. She looked at Aliana with wide eyes, her grip on her tightening instinctively. "You-You're serious?"

Aliana nodded. "Yes. I want to raise a family with you. When all of this is over, I just want to live my life. I want to settle down with the woman I love and... have a daughter of my own."

Rey swallowed the rising wedge in her throat, her eyes beginning to burn with unshed tears. "I want that too," she said, her voice cracking somewhat. "That's all I ever wanted. A family. Someone to come home to. A home filled with love. All my life I was searching for that. I want that with you Alie."

Aliana sighed in sheer joy and wrapped her arms tighter around Rey. "I think Naboo would be a great place. It's close to our friends. And it's... it's beautiful. Just like you."

Red blossomed on Rey's cheek. "...Kriffing hell. How are you always so charming?"

"I'm gay, lonely, and desperately in love," Aliana giggled, leaning up to kiss Rey's cheek.

Tiralli stepped off the Fury on Dantooine feeling humbled. Though he'd always known there was more to it than the Chancellor and his support base let on, the Republic had done a good job of painting Amorosa as the next Palpatine. As ruthless, violent, and showing no remorse in her quest for power. To listen to them, Darth Amorosa was the bane of the New Republic waiting to happen. But in only an hour, Tiralli had seen a very different side of that story. Aliana was the spitting image of her mother, and every bit as kind, compassionate and pleasant as her.

And she was his daughter. And she was in pain.

Though he knew he wasn't at fault, Tiralli couldn't help but feel a twinge of guilt at having not been there for his daughter. Tahleea hadn't once told him about her, and it seemed that she'd known he was her father and chose not to reach out. He couldn't help but take her tacit rejection of him personally, though he didn't share those feelings with her. As hurt as he was, it hadn't *been* personal for Aliana. But he couldn't shake the feeling that he should have done *something* to spare his daughter the sheer amount of pain she'd suffered in her life.

But maybe he could do something now. She didn't want a father in her life, but that didn't mean he couldn't be an ally. Someone in her corner.

A friend.

The woman he loved had been murdered, and in her place was their daughter. Deeply traumatized from having to watch the Jedi slay her mother and nearly slay her in kind. Having had to grow up without anyone to care for her, and hunted at every turn. A decade of loneliness and crippling misery that she likely wouldn't start recovering from until after she'd had her revenge on the people who had wronged her.

On the Jedi.

She'd already killed Luke Skywalker and had Ben Solo in her crosshairs, but Tiralli could easily see that killing the people who had attacked her wasn't her true vengeance. She was still laying the groundwork for it. Creating the foundations of a new global superpower to challenge the Republic's dominance and destroy the comfort the Senate had enjoyed even during the days of the Galactic Empire. Though he wasn't Force Sensitive, Tiralli was extremely politically savvy. He could see the beginning of a new alliance that would persist and forever change the balance of power in the galaxy. Forever give the Republic something to keep them in check.

But the foundations of a new Sith Empire was a pittance compared to what she was preparing to do to the Jedi Order. To forever reshape it in her image through the way she had influenced the last remaining Jedi in the galaxy. A new Jedi Order would not rise to serve the Republic. It would rise to serve the people. Those the Republic was keen to forget. It would be built on values that cared little for the Senate. The values of a woman who had grown to love someone the Republic had thoroughly wronged.

The Jedi and Sith Orders were on a course to become staunch allies for millenia to come. A blood feud that had been the backbone behind almost every war in galactic history would come to an end, and change the face of galactic politics forever. It would turn over the rock and expose the galaxy's seedy underbelly. A machine that was oiled with the blood of trillions but so far avoided the pages of galactic history.

Aliana Beniko was going to break the galaxy in half, and shatter every comfortable status quo that had so far served the few people who ruled it. History would never forget her vengeance.

She was truly Sith to the very core.

So Proud of My Girls

Chapter Notes

03/07/2023 - Slightly edited the conversation about Aliana's hair to be more about her depression-induced neglect. Previously it sounded like it was denigrating her natural hair, which was not the intention.

“Nihilus Wing is in orbit around Naboo, and prepared to strike against the First Order,” Aliana explained, bringing up the fleet positions on the holomap. The plans to use Naboo as a jumping off point for the war had been going smoothly. Most of the fleet had been moved to the Mid Rim now that they had a reliable shipyard. Naboo turned out to be the perfect place for a fleet, and had a naval construction capacity that the Republic had undervalued. Aliana had struck gold with this deal.

“I hope the Queen knows what she’s getting into,” Leia frowned. “Seceding from the Republic is not a decision to be made lightly.”

“I’ll protect them, I promise,” Aliana said firmly.

Leia looked up from the holomap. There was a brief moment of quiet before the frown on her lips faded. “I know you will,” she nodded. “I have no doubt you’ll do good by them. I just worry about how messy this is going to get.”

“We can’t really stop it from getting messy. The Republic chose to blockade them,” Aliana said.

“I know that, but the escalation-”

“Is inevitable.”

Leia opened her mouth, then closed it. “...True enough,” she conceded, leaning against the holoterminal as her eyes looked over the projection again. “The fleet’s done a good job with hit and runs so far. How good are they holding the line, do you think?”

“Nihilus Wing has most of the fighters and heavy cruisers,” Aliana explained. “They can hold it. And more volunteers are coming from the Outer Rim every day. The promise of having the Hutts kicked off their worlds when this is over is too tantalizing to pass up.”

“Well that’s at least assuring,” Leia said. “Do I want to know why it’s called Nihilus Wing?”

“The civilians got into the Fury’s archives and started naming the wings after Sith Lords,” Aliana chuckled.

Leia’s brow furrowed slightly. “...The public is taking a rather surprising interest in the Sith,” she mused.

“It’s understandable. They fight under the command of a Sith, curiosity starts to rise,” Aliana nodded.

“But considering the Sith’s legacy…”

“To the average schmuck in the galaxy, there isn’t one,” Aliana explained. “Most people never meet a Force User in their life, and people remember Palpatine as a Senator and Chancellor first and a Sith Lord second. His ability to use the Force wasn’t as well known as Vader. And in the Outer Rim, Jedi and Sith are fundamentally the same thing.”

Leia blinked. “How are they the same thing?”

“Robes. Deadly laser swords. Nigh incomprehensible powers. The colours don’t really matter to them,” Aliana explained. “The differences aren’t clear to anyone who doesn’t have a vested interest in either side.”

“But I-”

“Leia, put yourself in the shoes of some Nar Shaddaa dreg who spends all their time mining spice for the Hutts,” Aliana explained. “The Jedi and Sith are so far removed from your life that you don’t even think about them. They’re something for the rich and powerful to worry about, because they have both historically served the rich and powerful. It’s such a non-issue in your life that if someone asked you the difference the most you could say is robes and lightsaber colours.”

“But the Jedi historically have served the Republic,” Leia said.

“And what does that matter?” Aliana asked. “The Republic looks like a bastion of goodness and freedom, but like any galactic government its interests are nowhere near the people. People die of preventable disease and starvation in the Republic every single day.”

Leia’s lips pressed into a thin line. That was certainly an inarguable point. She spent too long around the Republic to argue anything of the sort from a place that wasn’t sheer naivety.

“...Alright,” she nodded. “So neither the Republic nor the Jedi are viable options for these people so they turn to the Sith. Understandable. Has that often been the case in Sith history?”

“Not really,” Aliana shook her head. “They didn’t so much turn to the Sith as they turned to me. I spent most of my life after my mother’s death in the Outer Rim doing what I could to get by. That’s why Niima hated me so much. I was doing things like enforcing picket lines, killing Hutt enforcers, and doing things for the regular people. That fosters loyalty, and a reputation.”

“And if they take a liking to the Sith way after all this is over?” Leia asked, her tone more curious than accusatory.

“There really isn’t a ‘Sith way’ right now, is there?” Aliana shrugged.

“There is if you decide there is,” Leia said. “I mean, at the end of the day, the Sith had to mean *something*. Why else would they spend so long opposing the Jedi otherwise.”

“You’re right, the Sith do have to mean something,” Aliana nodded. “And I’m surprised you’re so confused about this, Leia. You embody the Sith code to a T.”

Leia blinked, saying nothing for the longest time and instead looking at Aliana like she had just grown a second head. "...I beg your pardon? How do I-?"

"Well let's look back at the Rebellion," Aliana said, pressing a few buttons on the holoterminal and bringing up recordings of the Empire's rise to power.

"You're getting faster with that," Leia remarked.

"Thanks. Rey's lessons are finally sinking in," Aliana smiled as she hit another button. "Here we are." The image of Palpatine stood in the Chancellor's podium, gesturing to a Senate neither of them could see. *"The Republic will be reorganized into the first Galactic Empire! For a safe and secure society!"*

"Say what you will of the Empire, but it ended the Clone Wars," Aliana said in an almost teasing tone. "The Galaxy was at peace once again. And isn't that the goal of the Republic?"

Leia was quiet for a moment before saying, "...From a certain point of view. But that peace came at a cost."

"Indeed it did. And Palpatine was pulling the strings of both sides of the Clone Wars," Aliana remarked. "A lot of people, including you in your adulthood, saw what the Empire was doing. Now you could have just made the best of a bad situation, sat around complacent. I mean it wasn't as if the Empire was going to affect you in your ivory tower, was it?"

"Well no, but it wasn't about me," Leia said with a hint of indignance. "It was about the countless others who were suffering under the Empire and living in fear. I couldn't in good conscience stand by and let that happen."

"Exactly. You couldn't. You committed the single most heinous crime imaginable to those in power, and indeed the Jedi," Aliana said. "You gave a kriff. You cared. You were passionate about the people the Empire was torturing, who were the same people the Republic was torturing before then. The Empire didn't rise up overnight, it was oppressing people long before it changed its name. The Senate was still in power for a very long time after."

Leia chewed on that information for a moment. She remembered growing up on stories of the Republic's benevolence before becoming the Empire. Then she grew old enough to know how exactly that came to pass and had to come to terms with the fact that the old system was not infallible and incorruptible. Not when she lived to see its corruption. If the Republic didn't fall, she likely would have continued to cause problems for the status quo regardless. "So ensuring the freedom of the galaxy aligns me with the Sith?" she asked.

"The concept of freedom itself is a crucial element to the Sith code," Aliana nodded.

"It is?"

"Think about what the Jedi were doing before the Purge. They kept the peace. They fought in the interests of a Republic that betrayed them at the first opportunity," Aliana explained. "They didn't care about the people the Republic was oppressing, because they conditioned themselves to think that caring was evil. *Peace is a lie, there is only Passion.*"

"So you're saying that the Jedi's insistence on letting go of emotions and attachments was their undoing," Leia mused. "That if they actually cared, the Order wouldn't have fallen?"

“Possibly. Some people view the Dark Side of the Force as this corrupting thing that will only take from you. Almost like a drug. And they believe that because the Jedi told them to believe that,” Aliana explained. “But both sides of the Force can be used for good or evil. The Jedi Order became apathetic. So detached that they would do nothing. And apathy is the worst kind of feeling. It’s worse than fear, anger and hatred combined. It’s worse than death, because at least a corpse will feed something. Apathy will always support the status quo, regardless of whether it is just or not.”

“I can’t argue that,” Leia sighed. “Being surrounded by so many people who would just sit there and do nothing, even when the evil of the Empire was right in front of them... it was infuriating.”

“Exactly. You and others like you wanted to do something. And simply standing up and doing something inspired others to do the same. Once someone is the first to stand, others follow suit. And so the Rebel leaders taking a stand brought others around them. And the more people your passion inspired, the stronger the Rebellion became. *Through Passion, I gain Strength.*”

Leia considered that. “That’s why the Jedi did not lead the charge against the Empire,” she said. “They taught themselves not to embrace their passions.”

Aliana nodded. “You can’t lead a charge for a cause you care nothing for. You and the other rebel leaders brought people together, united against the Empire. You accomplished things that no single person, not even a Force user could accomplish. You *destroyed* the Death Star. The Empire’s greatest symbol of its own power and you blasted it to smithereens just by uniting the galaxy. *Through Strength, I gain Power.*”

Leia couldn’t help but smile at that for a moment before a thought came to her. “If passion was enough for us to defeat the Empire, why was it not able to save it? Did Palpatine, as a Sith, just... not care?”

“Well that’s the thing. The Sith Code doesn’t end there,” Aliana smiled. “Sith like Palpatine were so fixated on power for power’s sake, but power even in the Sith Code is a means to an end. And Palpatine didn’t unite people in the Empire, he ruled through fear and an iron grip. And the moment that grip slackened just a little bit, people realized that it could be broken. The Rebellion uniting against the Empire and destroying the Death Star was a morale blow to the Empire it would never recover from. *Through Power, I gain Victory.*”

“Victory enough to free the galaxy,” Leia concluded.

Aliana nodded. “*Through Victory, my chains are broken.* The critical failing of the Sith is that they were obsessed with singular power for power’s sake. Building superweapons and delving deeper into the Force to achieve immortality. Their own power, relying on nobody else. And every single time they are brought down when the galaxy unites against them. Revan. Malak. Vitiate. Bane. Sidious. All of them fell because they failed to learn the first lesson that every acolyte must learn. *Peace is a lie, there is only Passion. Through Passion, I gain Strength. Through Strength, I gain Power. Through Power, I gain Victory. Through Victory, my chains are broken.*”

Leia allowed the verses of the Sith Code to wash over her, dwelling on each of them for a time. “I... never considered the Sith Code that way,” she admitted. “Luke always read it as a cautionary tale of greed and self interest. Putting your needs over others. With how Palpatine ruled, I was inclined to believe him.”

“Anyone can repeat the Sith Code. But if you ask them what it means, you’d be hard pressed to find an answer. I’d wager that Sidious never once thought about the Sith Code, and simply pushed

on in his quest for power,” Aliana nodded. “But Strength and Power come from many places. It’s why I hold the Eternal Alliance that my ancestors formed close to my heart. Because for all the Sith Empire’s achievements, this place embodies the Sith Code more than the ruins of Kaas City ever will. That is what it means to be Sith.”

“Interesting,” Leia said, a gentle smile on her face. “...I think I would like to learn more about your family. Read up on their exploits. If you’ll allow it, of course.”

Aliana smiled. “I think that can be arranged.”

Rey touched down on the surface of Elom, groaning in frustration. The ship she borrowed wasn’t equipped for the kind of rough rides she took through the Outer Rim, and had torn an engine off in an asteroid belt. She slammed her hand against the controls once the landing gear had locked in place.

“Great. This is just great,” she huffed as she got out of the pilot’s seat. “I take one excursion and I’ve already crashed. Good going Rey.”

She flushed with the dashboard, checking to see which functions were still online. The holocom buttons were flickering. Perhaps she could get a message back to Odessen? “This is Rey to the Resistance base,” she uttered into the receiver. “Rey to the Resistance base, do you read me?” Nothing. She attempted altering the frequency. “Rey to Fury. 2V? Alie? You copy?” Static. “Kripping beautiful. Comms are out.” She slumped against the wall for a moment before lifting her head to look out the ruined viewport.

The surface of Elom reminded her of Nathema. A world that appeared to be more ash than anything else. There was no soul stealing Void to speak of, but she definitely felt the pull of the Dark Side.

“Perhaps I can salvage some scrap to fix the comms,” she sighed, pushing herself off the wall.

Stepping outside, she saw the extent of the damage. One of the engines had been ripped off. A minor problem, the other could get her to a spaceport for repairs, but the reactor was damaged as well. No wonder the comms were out. No power. Still that wasn’t completely-

She felt a presence behind her and whirled around. “Hello?” she called out. Nothing. “Who’s there? I can sense you so don’t bother trying to hide!” The presence remained in front of her, but she saw nothing. No masking. No scurrying off to hide behind terrain. The presence remained felt, but unseen. That meant it wasn’t corporeal. Aliana warned her about Sith Specters. Unlike the spirits of certain Jedi who could roam from place to place at will, the souls of fallen Sith Lords were bound to a certain place. Usually their tombs. Either to protect the secrets that were buried with them or to lure hapless force users in an attempt to seize control of their bodies and walk the galaxy again. Seldom ever were they friendly. Rey’s hands crackled with power she was itching to use. There were no friends here. No innocents. If she had to unleash her unstable power on this near dead world just to survive, she would.

For a while, everything was quiet. Then, like a flicker, a black vapor started to swirl in place where the presence was. Rey took a step back, ready to unleash a storm of lightning, when the smoke coalesced into a figure. A figure she recognized. Her eyes widened and her hands dropped to her sides as she looked upon the spectral face of Tahleea Beniko. Her mother-in-law.

“Ah good. I still have strength enough for you to see me,” Tahleea said with a weak laugh. “You must be Rey. It’s a pleasure to finally meet you.”

Rey blinked. “You... know me?”

Tahleea nodded. “Yes I do, little one. You’re the scavenger that’s making my little girl so happy.”

Rey could only gape at Tahleea for a moment, unsure of what to say to that. “I... How is this possible?” she asked.

“You should know about Spectres by now,” Tahleea smiled. “I’ve been watching my little girl for a long time. But it’s only in places like this that I can... speak.”

Rey looked around, taking in the Dark power that surrounded them. It made sense. Despite dying on Corelia, the world wasn’t strong enough in either side of the Force to tether one’s soul to it. Worlds like this were all Tahleea could use.

“I... Lord Mayrik,” she greeted a little sheepishly. “It is such an honor to actually meet you. I... don’t have the words.”

“Please, you can call me Tahleea,” the Sith smiled. “We’re family, after all.”

Rey felt her smile widening. Family. The prospect always filled her with joy no matter how many times she heard it. “Alright, Tahleea,” she corrected. “I had no idea your spirit was still around. I thought Alie would have told me.”

“Star has been... avoiding planets strong in the Dark Side. She doesn’t know,” Tahleea said sadly. “I feared I might fade away without the chance to speak to her again. Oblivion calls to me.”

A sinking feeling settled in Rey’s stomach. That Tahleea’s spirit was lingering in the galaxy this whole time and Aliana didn’t know. The family that Alie had missed for so long being just out of reach. And now she threatened to be forever out of reach? “I... I can get her here!” she said. “I just need something to fix the comms on my ship and I can bring Alie here!”

Tahleea reached up and cupped Rey’s cheeks. “I’m sure you will. But please... sit. Speak with me awhile. I’d like to get to know my daughter-in-law.”

Rey felt silent, inwardly marveling at how... real Tahleea’s hand felt on her face. How... warm, despite the nature of her presence. “...Okay,” she nodded. “What... what would you like to know?”

Tahleea guided Rey to sit down on the docking ramp of her ship, taking a seat beside her. “It’s been a while since that horrible day on Jakku.”

“You remember me?”

Tahleea nodded. “Oh how I wanted to just take you and run. Star too. She was so angry when we had to leave you there.”

Rey felt a flustered shade of red grow on her cheeks. “...She told me that I was clingy,” she said with a nervous laugh. “And that she would sing to me to stop me from crying.”

“She did,” Tahleea nodded. “When we had to leave you there, she angrily declared that she’d go back and get you when the ship was hers. I didn’t expect her to actually do it.”

Rey chuckled. "It was a chance meeting, actually," she said. "She needed someone to install a new hyperdrive. Paid me in at least a year's worth of portions and a home cooked meal."

Tahleea giggled softly. "That sounds like her. She was always a romantic. Used to spend all her free time watching sapphic holodramas."

"Was her favorite always 'Hunters across the Stars?'" Rey asked with a grin.

"Yes! She would watch every episode a hundred times over!" Tahleea exclaimed with fond exasperation.

"She sat me down and made me watch the entire thing," Rey laughed. "She's seen it so many times and still cries at the end."

Tahleea giggled softly, laying a hand on Rey's knee. "...I'm so sorry about leaving you on Jakku. That must have been a horrible way to grow up."

Rey's smile faded slightly, growing more wistful. "...It's alright," she said. "I stayed there longer than I should have. Waiting for parents that would never come." She felt quiet for a moment as the thought of her birth parents returned to the forefront of her mind. It wasn't too long ago that they, or rather the idea of them, were all she could think about. Nowadays, she had to be reminded of them. "Alie killed them when she learned what they had done. She didn't remember it was me they did it to, but that was enough for her. I... couldn't help but be thankful at the time. Still am, really."

Tahleea smiled sadly. "I'm sorry. Growing up without loving parents... I can't imagine what that revelation must have been like."

"It's fine. I have Alie now," Rey said, laying a hand over Tahleea's. "And 2V."

Tahleea giggled. "There's a small comfort knowing that my Star still has one of her ancestors left."

"I still can't believe that 2V is an Alliance Era droid," Rey marveled. "They really built things to last back then, didn't they?"

"Well, some people did," Tahleea shrugged. "So long as there are debt collectors in the galaxy, there's planned obsolescence to make a codependent populace."

"Yeah, I guess-" Rey's eyes widened slightly. "Wait, ancestor? How is 2V an ancestor?"

"Oh you didn't know?" Tahleea chuckled. "A few thousand years ago, one of the women of our family fell in love with 2V."

Rey blinked. "...You're joking."

"I am not," Tahleea snorted. "He's as much a Beniko as the rest of us."

"You are joking!" Rey balked before doubling over in laughter.

"I'm not! 2V isn't just a service droid we adopted, he's actually family," Tahleea laughed. "He saw both me and Aliana as his grandchildren."

"By the kriffing stars!" Rey cackled. "Wait, did he actually love this woman back? Like, there was actual romance between them?"

“Indeed,” Tahleea nodded. “He admittedly locked a lot of those memories away for privacy’s sake, but he still remembers her fondly.”

Rey’s laughter died down. “By the stars, that’s actually kinda sweet!”

“It was,” Tahleea smiled. “He said it’s been difficult to find another person that... charges his circuits like she did. I truly think she was his one and only.”

Rey’s laughter simmered down to some quiet giggling. As ridiculous as the notion of a romance with a droid sounded, she couldn’t deny that it was cute and a little sad that he was without her. But also sweet in the way he stuck around to take care of the rest of his family.

“I can certainly understand the feeling,” Rey smiled. “I can’t imagine loving anyone else the way I love Alie.”

“That’s wonderful,” Tahleea smiled brightly, taking Rey’s hands and squeezing them. “I’ll always think of you as my daughter, Rey.”

Rey smiled, squeezing Tahleea’s hands in kind. “And I would be honored to have a mother like you,” she said softly.

Tahleea pulled Rey into a hug and squeezed her as tightly as only a mother could. “Thank you for saving my baby girl.”

Rey smiled and accepted the hug wholeheartedly. “She saved me just as much,” she said softly, pulling away just enough to look at Tahleea again, but staying in her arms. “But... is there a way to save you? I mean, I’m quite powerful. If there’s anything I can do-”

Tahleea shook her head. “Some things can’t be fixed with power. Oblivion awaits me and I’ve made peace with that. I only want to see my little girl again and tell her how proud of her I am.”

A wave of melancholic defeat washed over Rey. She couldn’t help but feel frustrated with herself. She had the power to ignite a star in the palm of her hands and, once again, it proved absolutely useless for her. She stamped those feelings down. No. She wouldn’t dwell on what she couldn’t do. She would focus on what she could do. “Then I’ll get her to you,” Rey said firmly.

Tahleea’s smile widened and Rey could have sworn that her eyes were glistening with unshed tears. “Thank you.”

Rey nodded before reluctantly pulling away. “Alright... first thing first. Is there any scrap on this world?”

Tahleea smiled. “It’s an old Sith world. There’s always something to find.”

“Good! Then let’s get to work fixing this piece of junk!”

“What do you mean, Chancellor? What good is one comm station?” Leia asked as the image of Chancellor Vilecham flickered before her.

“It isn’t just a comm station. It’s one of the First Order’s redirection hubs. Half of all their communications come through there, and it contains too much valuable intel to pass up. Once the

archives are downloaded, destroying it will cripple the First Order's ability to mobilize," the Chancellor explained.

"We don't have the resources for that," Leia explained. "We'd need a crack team of slicers and demolition workers."

"...Or two engineering prodigies," Poe said, glancing at both Generals. "Rey and Rose could slice and dispatch that station in half the time."

Leia arched a brow at Poe. "You think we can risk our Jedi and most promising Admiral on a dicey operation like this?"

"Oh, absolutely not," Holdo tutted shaking her head. "I mean, it's not as though a soldier of your station ever risked her life needlessly for even dicier operations."

The General sighed. "...Alright, point taken," she conceded.

"Maybe we shouldn't volunteer my wife for a dangerous mission when she's not here to speak for herself?" Aliana said, looking visibly distressed. Comm hubs were no joke, they were a nightmare to navigate and were crawling with Stormtroopers. The thought of anything happening to Rey in there filled her with dread.

"Where is Rey, actually?" Poe asked, his eyes scanning over the War Room.

"She went out to do some salvage work to the Outer Rim a few days ago," Leia explained. "She should be back soon." A slight frown then tugged at her thin lips. "Though I feel she would have checked in at least once by now."

As if on cue, the comm light started to blink rapidly. The display showed Rey's holofrequency. Aliana jumped and looked up at Villecham. "Sorrychancellorgottagobye!" she said, cutting the feed and bringing up Rey's comm signal. "Rey? Sweetie?"

"Alie!" Rey sighed in relief from the other end. "Finally I got through."

"Something wrong?"

"I crashed on the planet Elom," Rey explained. "Have you heard of it?"

"Yeah it's an old Sith planet," Aliana nodded. "What about it?"

"I need you to come out here," Rey explained. "The ship is mostly repaired but the Hyperdrive isn't at capacity. Besides, there's something here you need to see!"

"What is it?" Aliana pressed.

"...Sith stuff," Rey said, her vague response earning an arched brow or two. "Look, it's something you really don't want me talking about in front of the others. Trust me."

"I can't tell if that's ominous or dirty," Poe mused.

"Me neither," Aliana said. "Alright Rey, I'll take off for Elom right away. I'm trusting you, so if this is just a ploy to have sex in ruins I'm going to be very miffed."

“It’s not, I promise,” Rey said with a smile. “I’ll be on the southwest hemisphere when you arrive. Please hurry.”

“Alright,” Aliana smiled as she flicked the holoterminal off. “She’s going to be holding a riding crop when I get there, I just know it.”

“Never thought Rey was the kind of girl to play those games,” Poe said. “She always seemed more like a ‘Here and now,’ type.”

“Oh she is,” Aliana smirked, pushing off the holomap and turning for the door.

Rose rolled her eyes as Aliana left, glancing at Finn. “Well they sure got kinky quickly.”

“I’d be more surprised if they didn’t,” Finn smirked.

“Alright. That’s enough discourse about their sex lives,” Leia chided, turning to Rose. “Admiral, before we even humor the Chancellor’s proposition, we’re going to need detailed schematics on that station. As detailed as we can find.”

“I’ll get some fighters launched with Rey’s new probes,” Rose nodded. “A few scouting runs and we’ll know everything there is to know about it.”

“Are those probes fit to launch already?” Leia asked.

“Oh yeah! Crazy, I know!” Rose smiled. “Rey is an absolute beast in the labs!” Rey had been pouring herself into her tech work the last few months, designing better guns, scanning probes that could penetrate planetary shields, and even building a few fighters from scratch. Rey had become a one-woman R&D department and her talent for turning scrap into something valuable had become a precious asset to the Resistance. She had even gone to recoding the firmware in Aliana’s cybernetic spine to be more efficient all because her wife experienced brief twitching in her hand one night.

“Well, at least Rey and Alie will have news to come back to when they’re done with their weird Sith tomb sex,” Poe snickered.

“Captain! What did I just say!” Leia chastised.

The Fury descended onto Elom where the comm signal was broadcasting. Rey’s shuttle was half-repaired and she was sitting there talking to another person Aliana couldn’t recognize from her altitude. “2V, who is that?” she asked.

“I’m not sure. They aren’t showing up on our scans, Miss Alie,” 2V explained.

Not showing up? Was this a Force Ghost? It couldn’t be, this was a Sith world steeped in the Dark Side. What Jedi ghost would reside here of all places? A bad feeling ran up Aliana’s spine as she brought the ship down close to the shuttle. “Put the ship into standby and be prepared for the worst.”

“I always am, Miss Alie,” 2v nodded, punching in the commands on his datapad. “The Fury will be ready to jump to hyperspace at a moment’s notice.”

Aliana steeled her nerves as she made her way to the airlock. A Force Ghost on a Sith world. Either it was the soul of an impossibly powerful Jedi, or the echo of any number of Sith Lords buried beneath the surface. Neither of which she was thrilled about. Especially since Elom was once the home of some particularly nasty Sith teachings. *'But why would Rey ask me to come all this way to show me a ghost?'* Aliana asked herself as the docking ramp descended. As she drew near, both Rey and the ghost turned to her, both of them smiling. It was then that Aliana froze in her tracks. That face... the hair... it had been so long since she'd last seen her, but she could have sworn she was looking at...

"...What is this?" she said quietly, almost nervously glancing at her wife.

Rey was the first to approach, her smile impossibly gentle. "This is who I brought you here to meet," Rey said softly. "I didn't think you would believe me without seeing for yourself."

Aliana looked back at the ghost, her hands trembling hard at her side. She couldn't speak. She could barely breathe. It felt like all she could do to stay on her feet. "R-Rey... that's not- it can't be," she rasped out, damn near sobbing on the spot.

"But it is," Rey assured her warmly, holding onto Aliana's shoulders. "It's not a deception. I promise you."

Aliana allowed herself to be led to the ghost, looking her mother in the eye for the first time in eleven years. Tahleea had stayed where she was, allowing her daughter to approach at her wife's coaxing. "M-Motina?"

Tahleea nodded and stepped closer. "It's me, Star."

The vision before Aliana began to blur as stinging tears welled in her eyes. That voice. *Her* voice. There was no mistaking it. "H-How-!?"

"Well, it wasn't easy," Tahleea shrugged with a lopsided grin. "Had to find a planet strong in the Dark Side that wasn't already crawling with spectres looking to eat my power to fuel themselves."

Aliana swallowed a lump in her throat as she reached out and touched her mother's arm. This wasn't real. It couldn't be real. There was no way her mother was here right now, this was a holo, right? No, her hand pressed into her arm, feeling the texture of her mother's robes. She was solid and corporeal. It really *was* her, brimming with the Dark Side of the Force. "Motina, it's really you," she whispered, before throwing herself into her mother's arms. Arms that held her for the first time in so long. She couldn't hold back the tears any longer.



“Shhh, it’s okay, Star,” Tahleea whispered warmly, a single kiss pressed to the top of Aliana’s head as she wept.

“M-Motina!” Aliana choked out, her face buried in the fabric of Tahleea’s cloak. “I-I can’t believe you’re really here!”

“Yes, I’m here,” Tahleea said, holding her daughter tightly. “I’m here, it’s okay.”

“I missed you so much,” Aliana cried. “Everything was so horrible after you were gone, I didn’t know what to do or where to go, I-”

“Shhh,” Tahleea said soothingly. “It’s alright. You did wonderfully, my little shade.”

Rey took a step back, content with simply watching. She watched as Aliana heaved another heavy sob, clinging to the ghost of her mother as though her life depended on it. She watched as Tahleea held her close in turn, her gentle words of comfort soft and patient but overflowing with an unmistakable love. Rey’s own eyes began to burn, her own tears adding to the moment. She tried to keep her crying silent, not daring to break the atmosphere these two found themselves in.

“By the stars, you’ve grown so much,” Tahleea marveled, pulling back just enough to look at her daughter.

“Not enough,” Aliana said with a small laugh. “I’m shorter than everyone I know.”

“I’m sure they love that about you. Just as I’m sure they love everything else.” Tahleea sighed happily, cupping her daughter’s cheek as she looked her over. “Your hair’s a mess though. It’s dried out and broken in places.”

Aliana glanced away, feeling self-conscious for the first time. In truth she neglected a lot of things during the last ten years. Not just her hair. She barely slept, she ran on near constant adrenaline highs, and battled with suicidal thoughts. “Things were... rough. It was just one of the things I didn’t really... bother with. Couldn’t really summon the drive.”

“Oh my Star,” Tahleea whispered, pulling her closer and kissing the top of her head. Then she cast her eyes up to Rey. “When she was little, I used to put her hair in a different style every week. She loved it.”

“Could never really do it like you could” Aliana said with a slight giggle, her voice still thick with emotion. “I... could never really do anything like you could.”

“That’s right,” Tahleea nodded, resting her head atop Aliana’s. “Some things you did *better* .”

Aliana’s breath stuttered. “R-Really?”

“What? You didn’t think I felt you stop a planet buster from vaporizing an entire system?” Tahleea’s asked.

Aliana blinked. “You... you knew about that?”

Tahleea nodded. “I could feel it, and I knew it was you. I’ve been keeping my senses out looking for you over the years. I wanted to know what happened to my baby girl.”

“You’ve been watching me all this time?” Aliana gasped.

“Of course. I wish I could have reached you sooner, little shade. But you kept avoiding planets strong in the Dark Side. I can’t talk to you outside worlds like these.”

Aliana’s heart fell as a sinking realization came to her. “I kept feeling these... alien presences whenever I got near a dark side planet. It freaked me out and I didn’t go near,” she said quietly. “I never even considered that it might have been you. I thought you were beyond my reach forever...”

The smile on her mother’s face faded slightly, her gaze suddenly becoming distant. “...Well, not *yet* , at least,” she said, a slight waver in her voice.

Aliana’s eyes widened slightly. “W-What do you mean? Am I not going to be able to come back?”

“It’s not that,” Tahleea shook her head. “It’s just that... its taken so much of who I am to stick around this long. To stop from... crossing over.” She closed her eyes, looking as though she was fighting back tears herself. “...I don’t know how much more time I’ve got, Star.”

“Oh...” Aliana’s heart sank at the realization that this would likely be the last time she ever saw her mother. “...I’m sorry. I should have come sooner. There was so much time we could have had and... and I just didn’t...”

“Hey,” Tahleea interjected, placing a hand on her daughter’s cheek. “You couldn’t have known. And you have a hell of a lot more to worry about. Don’t go beating yourself up over this, okay?”

Aliana sniffled, wiping at her eyes with a free hand. “Okay.”

A warm smile returned to Tahleea’s face. “I am just relieved I was able to hold my daughter in my arms one more time,” she whispered. “And tell her how proud I am of the woman she’s become.”

Aliana continued wiping her eyes as she leaned into her mother’s embrace. “Skywalker’s dead,” she said with a sniffle. “And his rat padawan’s not to far from it.”

“Oh, I don’t doubt it,” Tahleea said with a dark chuckle. “You’ve been leaving quite a splash, Star. The name Amorosa has been echoing across the galaxy for quite some time now.”

Aliana nodded. “After what happened on Corellia, I decided that I wasn’t going to hide. I was going to be *proudly* Sith. Hiding or abandoning it was exactly what the Jedi wanted. I was never going to give it to them.”

“And look at you now,” Tahleea said, grinning ear to ear. “Face of the free galaxy.”

“Oh, well, I don’t know about that,” Aliana said, averting her eyes bashfully.

“I do. Not since Caida has our family seen limelight like this.”

“Well I... I didn’t do it for the limelight...”

“Neither did she,” Tahleea said, gently tapping Aliana’s nose. “You’ve sent a cascade through the Force, sweetheart. The galaxy is shifting, and you’re the reason for it.”

“She is amazing like that, isn’t she?” Rey smiled, draping an arm around Aliana’s shoulder.

“She is,” Tahleea said. “Just so you know, Star, your lovely wife has been singing your praises ever since she arrived.”

Aliana glanced up at Rey, her cheeks darkening. “R-Really?”

“Do you think I’d miss the chance to tell your mother how much I love you?” Rey asked, wrapping her arms around Aliana’s shoulders and kissing the top of her head.

“She literally would not stop,” Tahleea snickered. “And if there’s anything I’m proud of most, is that you managed to find someone who loves you so much. Not many of your ancestors managed that.”

Aliana smiled and leaned back against Rey. “She means everything to me. I love her so much. We’re going to spend some time together alone after the war is over.”

“Maybe get this poor ol’ ghost some grandkids?” Tahleea prompted.

Aliana giggled softly. “That is in the cards. I do want children. And I’d tell them all about their grandmother...”

A beat of silence passed, Tahleea suddenly looking ready to cry herself. “Good things I hope?” she asked, her voice shaky.

“Nothing *but* good things,” Aliana grinned.

“I’ll hold you to that,” Tahleea said with a watery chuckle, wiping a rebellious tear from her eye. “Don’t make me haunt you, missy.”

Aliana giggled and squeezed her mother as tightly as she could. “*I wish this didn’t have to end,*” she murmured in Ancient Sith.

Tahleea sighed and rubbed Aliana’s back in small circles. “I still have time, Star,” she said, pulling away from her. “Come on, let me do your braids one last time.”

“Wait, really?” Aliana asked, an emotional tremor accenting the surprise in her voice.

“Of course,” Tahleea said, gently pulling her over to sit on a rock. “I’ll do them the way you always loved them, how’s that sound?”

“But... I mean I’ll have to take them out,” Aliana said timidly as she sat down.

Tahleea frowned, and then looked up at Rey who was still watching them intently with a big grin on her face. “Come here. I’m going to teach you how to do your wife’s hair.”

It didn’t seem possible, but Rey’s grin seemed to broaden even more. “Yes ma’am!”

“Oh. Oh no. None of that Ma’am business,” Tahleea tutted. “You’re family, Rey. Mom will do just fine.”

It was Rey’s turn to feel the burn of tears in her eyes. “...Yes, mom.”

“Come here then, sit down beside me,” Tahleea said as she started parting Aliana’s hair. “And bring me the clips over there.”

“And then she just picks the girl up and cradles her right there in the middle of the Void,” Rey smiled as she spun a strand of Aliana’s hair into braids. “It was unbelievably pure.”

“Reminds me of when you were on the ship and she sung you to sleep. She always had knack for making people feel better when they were in distress,” Tahleea giggled. “Not too tightly, sweetie, you don’t want to pull on her scalp.”

“Right. Sorry,” Rey said sheepishly, tilting her head to get a better look at Aliana’s expression. “How’re you doing, sweetheart?”

“I’m in heaven right now,” Aliana sighed, her eyes closed as she leaned back against Rey’s legs.

The two had been working for the last hour braiding her hair. Tahleea had been teaching Rey exactly how to get it just right, and she could see why this was her wife’s favorite. The braids started out tight, but as they moved down toward the ends of her hair they loosened until they faded into the beautiful ringlets she’d become accustomed to. The different lengths and layers involved was a lot to remember, but Rey had already set a holopad to record Tahleea’s lesson for future reference. “You were right, this is beautiful,” she smiled.

Tahleea smiled warmly, simply looking at her daughter. “I daresay they look better now than they ever have,” she whispered, brushing one of the braided locks aside to cup Aliana’s cheek.

“I like the grid it makes in her scalp,” Rey giggled as she pushed the braids aside and ran a finger down the lines dividing the roots of each braid. “It’s very organized, and I like that.”

“My daughter’s hair was always perfect for styling,” Tahleea said. “And she’d sit there for hours while I worked with it. She was always so excited to see what else could be done with it. It was a bonding moment for us.”

“Don’t suppose either of you two have a mirror?” Aliana asked, trying not to sound too excited to see the results.

“Not until we’re finished, Star,” Tahleea chided softly.

“Oh c’mon!” Aliana whined softly.

“Behave for your mother,” Tahleea said softly, kissing the top of her head.

The action silenced Aliana promptly. After going so long without such affection, even the ghost of it was disarming. In the best possible way.

“It does look very good, Alie,” Rey assured her, planting a tender kiss on her wife’s cheek. “You already look stunning.”

“Thanks,” Aliana sighed, reaching back to touch her wife’s hand. “Thank you for *all* of this. I never thought I’d ever talk to my Mom again.”

Rey gave Aliana’s hand a gentle squeeze. *‘I just wish I could have given you both more time.’* The thought passed as swiftly as it came, like a momentary chill in the wind. Fleeting, but it made itself known. She would not dwell on it. This was supposed to be a happy moment. They had to savor it for as long as they could.

“You two are precious,” Tahleea sighed, bringing her arms around the both of them. “I’m so happy you found each other.”

“Yeah,” Aliana nodded with a dreamy sigh. “I really lucked out with her, didn’t I?”

Rey’s smile became warm. Then it quirked with mischief. “...Would you say that our finding each other is fate? Perhaps the Will of the-”

“Don’t be a Jedi right now, dear,” Tahleea scolded gently, using a free hand to pinch Rey’s arm, who snickered in response. “Not during family time.”

“Yes, Mom,” Rey giggled.

The two of them returned to work on Aliana’s braids, occasionally sharing anecdotes about their lives. Mostly embarrassing stories from Aliana’s childhood. It took another hour to finish her hair, but when it was done they sat back and admired their handiwork. Aliana’s hair was immaculate, fading from organized braids into the loose and free curls that Rey always admired. If this had been Aliana’s favorite style growing up, Rey could certainly see why.

“Alie,” she whispered, using the force to pull a large, reflective sheet of broken glass out of the wreckage and holding it up to her. “You look absolutely stunning.” The sight of her own reflection made Aliana gasp. She had seen her hair exactly like this before, years ago. She gave up hope she would ever see it like this again. The vision before her suddenly became blurry with welling tears.

“Oh Alie,” Rey whispered, wrapping her arms around her wife’s shoulders and hugging her as tightly as she could. “Don’t cry, sweetheart. You’ve cried enough for one lifetime.”

Aliana clung to Rey for all that she was worth. As though everything and everyone would turn to dust around her if she let go. In truth, there was nothing saying that it wouldn’t. All she could do was hope.

“S-Sorry,” she rasped, trying to wipe her eyes against Rey’s tunic. “Just... emotional moment, you know?”

“You don’t need to apologize,” Rey assured her, pulling away just enough to tilt her head and kiss one of the tears away.

Aliana pulled back and smiled up at her. “I love you,” she said. “I love you so much.”

“And I love you too,” Rey whispered. “And I’m going to spend the next few days pampering you and making you feel like the goddess of the Dark Side I see whenever I look at you.”

Their moment of sheer marital bliss was cut short by the reverberation they both felt in the Force. They turned their eyes to Tahleea, whose form was starting to ripple. They both looked at her with equal parts understanding and anxiety.

“It’s nearly time, I’m afraid,” she said apologetically, holding out her arms to the both of them.

Aliana wasted no time falling into her mother’s arms, Rey following only a moment after. The inexplicable warmth of her ethereal form was not as present as it was earlier. The otherwise solid form they both crashed into had more give, feeling less solid by the moment.

“There’s just a few things left,” Tahleea said as she hugged her daughters as tightly as her deteriorating form would allow. “Rey, deep in the Fury’s computer core is an encrypted archive. Aliana could have never unlocked it herself, she was never interested in machinery, but you could. The encryption code is Mayrik-Sigma-Four.”

Rey looked up in confusion. “What is it?”

“Family photos and videos,” Tahleea smiled. “Of me and Aliana. Some of her father as well.”

Rey’s eyes widened, her lips parting wordlessly. She swallowed the emotional wedge in her throat before nodding, offering another watery smile. “Of course,” she whispered, voice thick with the threat of a sob.

“Thank you. I’d hate to see them waste away at the bottom of the ship,” Tahleea smiled, her eyes watering as she kissed the top of Aliana’s head. “And Alie... if you’d do your old mom one last favor?”

“Anything,” Aliana said, squeezing her tightly.

“...Try to give your father a chance,” she whispered. “I always regretted hiding you from him, and I know he would have loved you.”

Aliana’s thoughts drifted back to her father, the Senator. The man she happened upon by chance at a time where the truth was inescapable. They parted on friendly enough terms of course, but she was uncertain if she ever truly wanted to allow him into her life.

But that's not what her mother was asking her to do. All she was asking was that Aliana give him a chance. She could do that.

"Okay, mom," she said, tearful eyes nonetheless filled with conviction. "I will."

"Thank you. And... the next time you talk to him... tell him I love him very much," Tahleea said softly, kissing her forehead before pulling them both back in. "I love you both. I'm so proud of my girls."

"We love you too," Aliana whispered against her mother's robes, she and Rey clutching at her as tightly as they could. Trying to ignore the fact that they both could now feel through the surface of Tahleea's form. Not yet. Just a little longer. Alas, Tahleea pulled away from them. She backed up just enough to look them both in the eye, her own brimming with tears. She wanted to commit everything about her daughters to memory before the Force took her.

"Give them hell," she whispered, before her entire body dissipated into black vapor that faded with the breeze.

Aliana reached out for her. She couldn't help it. Her very nature dictated that she try and keep holding on. To keep her mother there. It was too late. All that Tahleea Beniko was became lost in the wind, leaving the two of them alone. The hand fell back to her side, trembling with the warring factions of joy, sorrow, relief and grief. She just had time with her mother again. More than she thought she would ever have, and now all she wanted was more. A trickle of guilt dripped coldly down her spine. Why did she have to be so selfish? When she already got more than she-

A hand grasped at hers, snapping Aliana out of her own mind. She turned to look to Rey, who was looking just a little more put together than she did. She couldn't help but be thankful for that. That she had someone she could rely on at this moment. "...Should we get back to the ship?" Rey asked, her voice shaky. "Or... do you need a little longer?"

Aliana blinked away the growing tears and squeezed her wife's hand. "Let's go back to the ship. I want to see those photos."

"Alright," Rey whispered, pulling Aliana in and softly kissing her cheek. "Tell you what. I'll draw you a nice bath, with all the trimmings you love, and you can relax while I unlock the archive. Then we can go through them together while I hold you and tell you how loved and cherished you are. How does that sound?"

"...I would like that," Aliana murmured, utterly quivering in Rey's arms.

"Then let's go," Rey smiled, gently guiding her back to the Fury. "After such an emotional day, you deserve to be pampered as much as possible."

The Last Gasp of the Jedi Order

The rippling pale blue of hyperspace was calming, in a way. Who knew that crossing the cosmos faster than any living being could feasibly go, using a loophole in physics, could be soothing. It wasn't like the reserved calming reds that illuminated Rey and Alie's chambers, but it wasn't a terrible substitute. Regardless, it wasn't enough to truly settle Rey's nerves as they neared their destination. It had been some time since she had an assignment of this significance. The last time would have been the Supremacy, a memory that still tied painful knots in Rey's stomach. Simply thinking about it, remembering how limp and lifeless Aliana's body was in her arms that day, it made her eyes sting with the threat of tears.

Her hands gripped the controls tightly, the metal and leather straining under her grasp. The console itself began to shake under the weight of her strength before she could think to reign it in. No. That wouldn't happen again. Aliana was safe back home. Rey was leading this operation alone. So long as she kept her head on straight and did nothing reckless, nothing would go wrong. The comm hub was a routing point. All First Order communications went through these stations scattered across First Order space and their locations were a closely guarded secret. Finding one was more valuable than twenty thousand spies on the Supremacy, especially if they could maintain access for an extended period of time. All their secrets at every level of security clearance would be laid bare for them to see.

"This is Irus to Talon," she said into the comm. "I'm twenty minutes out from the target."

"Reading you," came Talon's voice over the speaker. "The fleet is standing by to receive the data stream. How're you holding up?"

"Restless," Rey said plainly.

"Eager to see some action, eh?" Talon asked with a chuckle. "I can't blame you. Just let us know if you need any backup and we'll be there. Can't trust the Republic for scrap, after all."

A bitter laugh escaped Rey. As if she wasn't anxious enough, this mission was a joint effort with the Republic, who gave them these coordinates in the First place. It wasn't that she expected ulterior motives from them, especially not where the First Order was concerned. But Villecham most certainly did not forget his embarrassment at Alie's hands on Naboo. A prickle on the back of her neck suggested that something was amiss, and that she had to be ready for it.

She dropped out of Hyperspace and engaged the Fury's stealth drive. She hadn't even discovered it had one until she'd cracked open Mayrik's archives, finding detailed schematics of all the modifications she'd made to the ship. Evidently Aliana's weakness with computers and engines didn't come from her. The drive masked her heat signatures and put the ship into low power, closing in on the comm station at coasting speed. The residual power ran thrusters, life support and the cyberwarfare suite. She would close in, slice the system, get as much intel as she could and get out. Preferably with the First Order unaware.

"C'mon old girl, you can do it," she said, patting the control panel.

Intercepting likely encrypted data of this magnitude without a hardline was tricky business. Part of her wished they had brought R2 or BB-8 along, but trying to infiltrate the hub risked sending the

whole thing into lockdown. They had to do this remotely. The control panel lit up as an endless stream of encryption keys were sifted through, Rey's fingers drumming expectantly and impatiently all the while. She had hand selected these slice routines herself. Either these would work, or she was a rustier programmer than she thought.

Within a blink, the console went from pale blue to green. Rey smiled. She was in. "Beginning data transfer," she said, proceeding to download every last scrap of data she could find. The panels lit up with a rapid transfer of text and images, battle plans, movements, weapon schematics and-

Rey blinked as something crossed her sight and grabbed a datapad. She sifted through what she'd already downloaded until she found it. An entire archive of old historical documents along with weapon schematics packaged together into a ship design. Among them, excerpts from a book on the old Sith Empire.

-The Oppressor's weapon design was sinister and effective. Combining stolen Republic technology, Darth Angral constructed the first planet-killer. Capable of incinerating worlds, though not capable of destroying them. It nonetheless made them uninhabitable. It was a proto-death star in all but name. The weapon may have turned the tide in the war in favour of the Sith had it not been destroyed by the Jedi Kiandra Beniko, later known to the galaxy as Darth Caida.

Rey nearly smiled at that. It would seem that Alie was not the first Beniko to destroy a planet killer. But why was this ancient piece of Sith text in a data parcel with schematics? The question made Rey's heart sink. She continued sifting through the collected files, which continued to pour in unbeknownst to the rest of the station. She found blueprints, peer reviews, manifests, but what was it all tied to? "What are you building?" she whispered.

Then she found it. Schematics and progress reports for a battle cruiser, taking inspiration from the Oppressor and utilizing repurposed Death Star tech. The First Order was building a mobile planet killer, code named *Singularity*, and it was far along in production. Weapon tests were already underway on asteroids. Had Rey not abstained from a meal before leaving, she likely would have thrown up. Her mind was hurled back, almost violently, to Ilum. Upon the surface of a superweapon so monumental in power that Aliana nearly destroyed herself to stop it from reducing an entire system to dust. A weapon they only managed to destroy by little more than chance. Of course they would try and build a new one. Their entire conquest hinged on such dominating firepower. And if it could jump in and out of hyperspace, as these schematics suggested, whole worlds could be wiped out by the time any help arrived.

Rey reached for her personal comlink. "Talon. I'm sending you coordinates. Once the data is finished transferring, take the fleet there immediately. I'll tell the Republic the same."

"Why? What's wrong?"

"The First Order is building a planet killer! One capable of rapid Hyperspace travel," Rey exclaimed as she hammered on the control panel to uplink the critical data.

"What?!" Talon yelled over the comm.

"It's still under construction, but it has to be destroyed before it can be deployed," Rey said, continuing to set up the data transfer. On such low power it was a nightmare navigating the reactor's limits with necessary bandwidth.

"Alright, I'm alerting Odessen right away," Talon said.

“Don’t forget to tell the Pubs,” Rey said. “We can’t take any chances on this. We need to bring that thing down before it flies.

“Got it,” Talon affirmed. “Should we wait for Lady Amorosa?”

Rey’s hackles raised in response. “...No,” she shook her head. “It would take too long. Time is of the essence here.”

“Alright. I’ll meet you there. Talon out.”

Rey closed the comm and pulled the Fury away, growing increasingly frustrated with the stealth drive’s slow speed. She needed to jump to hyperspace *now*.

Then it hit her. She didn’t need to wait for the thrusters. She could move the ship herself. She leaned back in her seat and closed her eyes. Her senses reached outward, beyond her own matter, to the matter that surrounded her. Through the Force, she envisioned the Fury that enveloped her own body existing instead in the palm of her hand. Gingerly, she enclosed her grasp around it. Immediately, the ship creaked and groaned under her grasp, nearly shattering her concentration.

“You’ll have your control back once the Dyad is broken,” Aliana’s words echoed in her mind. *“But until then you need to restrain yourself.”*

Shame and uncertainty panged in her chest. Damn it all. She hated this. She hated how the Force refused her attempts at control. She despised that this accursed Force Bond with Kylo Ren made it so unreliable. She loathed how she had more power now than she had ever before, and yet she has never felt weaker. She released the Fury from her grip and slammed her fist into the control panel. What was the point of being strong in the Force if she couldn’t use it without killing herself or others? And why was this feedback loop only growing more intense as the days rolled on?

This situation was too dire. She threw caution to the winds and disabled the stealth drive, gunning the engines the moment they came online and setting the Hyperdrive to reboot. No doubt the comm hub detected her, knowing she was getting away with First Order secrets, but by the time they could do anything about it, that weapon was going to be molten slag drifting through space.

“Planet killers are bad enough, but one on the move? We’d never catch it in time once it was mobile,” Aliana balked as she read through Talon’s report. “Contact our ships on Naboo, tell them to get moving immediately!”

“At once, Dark Lady,” A Sith ensign said, saluting dutifully before rushing to their station to carry out their orders.

“Kripping hell,” Poe cursed, eyes fixed on the schematics on the holo terminal. “I guess it was wishful thinking to assume that Ren was sitting on his thumb all this time.”

“It’s always wishful thinking with Jedi,” Aliana growled, slamming her palm against the control panel. “If he’s not behind this, Pasma and that other one certainly are.”

“Can we get there in time?” Finn asked, his brow furrowed and his jaw clenched. “Rey might need help.”

“They’ll likely have reached their destination a hundred times over by the time we get there,” Aliana sighed. “Like it or not, we’ll have to trust our fleet and the Republic to see this done.”

Finn glanced at her. “You? Trust the Republic?”

“It’s not like I have a choice,” Aliana said, her fingers digging into the panel. “Sometimes that’s just the hand you’re dealt.”

Poe gave her a sympathetic look, placing a hand on her shoulder. “She’ll be okay,” he assured her.

“I’d like to believe that. But...” Aliana felt an overwhelming wave of dread wash over her. Not unlike the dread she felt before they learned about Starkiller Base. She couldn’t help but dwell on it. Wonder what the Force was telling her. Rey had to be in danger, right? Of course she was, she was going to disable a Planet Killer. But now she couldn’t feel anything but catastrophe before her. “...That’s the curse of being Force sensitive. You can see things before they happen, but even then not know what they are. Something’s going to go wrong, I know it.”

“You sure that’s the Force and not just anxiety?” Poe asked, with a slight smirk.

Aliana scoffed, swatting his shoulder.

“Well, at the very least there is some good news to be had,” Rose interjected, her eyes fixed on the console ahead of her. Out of all the intel Rey gathered for us, there is a data package filled with recorded speeches from Emperor Palpatine.”

Finn arched a brow. “Why is that good news, exactly?”

“Because now we know for certain that the galaxy wide transmission broadcasting Palpatine’s return is a hoax,” Rose explained. “With so many recordings of his voice, all you’d have to do is run these speeches through a holo composer and you can make Palpatine say whatever you want. We have concrete evidence to clear Aliana’s name.”

Aliana laughed. “If you think that’s going to settle the Republic, you’re sorely mistaken. They wanted to kill me after I saved their lives.”

“Oh, no. The Senate won’t care,” Rose agreed, shaking her head. “But the rest of the galaxy, the part that matters, can rest easy knowing you didn’t play them for fools.”

Aliana pursed her lips. That was true. The Senate and Hutt Cartels would still hate her, and she was fine with that. But the rest of the galaxy, the people...

“That’s an excellent idea,” she smiled. “Release this intel to every news, media and propaganda outlet you can find.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Rose said with a proud smile as she returned to her console.

“Well that’s a small comfort,” Aliana sighed, stepping away from the console. “I just wish it was enough.”

A hand found Aliana’s shoulder and she looked up to see Leia smiling down at her. “Why don’t you go get something to eat? I’ll contact the Republic and tell them to rendezvous with the Fury and Nihilus Wing.”

Aliana's eyes widened slightly with surprise before a small, gentle smile spread on her lips. "Thanks Leia," she said. "Be sure to let them know that if anything happens to my wife on their watch, I'll flay the senate alive."

Leia chuckled nervously. "Of course."

Rey was examining her weapons while the Fury sped through Hyperspace. A set of tricobalt charges she'd fashioned herself, with a high explosive yield that could punch through a ship's hull. She'd spent the last few hours finalizing the designs and constructing them. They were dangerous, but localized. A lot of force in a small area. She could use them to punch right through the Singularity's reactor core, setting off a catastrophic explosion. She only wished she had enough cobalt to make more of them.

"Shame," she murmured to herself. "If there's anything I want to blow up it's that bastard Re-"

A cold wave suddenly filled the room, causing her hackles to rise. Her stomach twisted into a familiar knot. 'Oh no. Dammit, not now!' She went stock still, her thoughts senses retreating inward, wrapping around her like a cloak. If she made herself, inconspicuous, invisible through the Force, as Alie could, maybe he wouldn't notice. The cloak shuddered and flickered, Rey trying as hard as she could to focus on what fuelled the Dark Side. Passion. She thought about Aliana, about Finn, Poe, Rose. Her family. What she would have when this nightmare was over. But it wasn't working. It was almost like she was running toward something that was speeding away faster than she could catch it.

Of course. The Force was still on it's machinations, and would be until this festering connection was cut. She growled as the cloak faded away, leaving her exposed. As soon as it did, a presence shimmered and coalesced into existence behind her. With a weary sigh, she turned around to see that insufferable face. "Oh. You're still alive," she deadpanned. "What a shame."

"Why wouldn't I be?" Kylo Ren asked, narrowing his eyes. "It's not as though you or your wife have had the nerve to show your face since Crait."

"Sorry about that, we were just so busy being five steps ahead of you we never had the chance to double back," Rey sneered.

"Scampering around the corners of the galaxy like rats," Ren said dismissively. "Hitting and running as true cowards do. Like our comm hub."

Rey's frown deepened. "So you learned I tripped a single alarm. Bravo. I hope you're not too proud of yourself."

"If you really were as powerful as you claim, you'd face me yourself."

"You're not part of this war effort," Rey said dismissively. "The rest of the First Order is a bigger priority. We'll get to you when we're cleaning up the scattered remnants of your men."

"This war will never be over as long as I am in control," Ren huffed. "And so long as I'm in control, you'll never be rid of me."

"Oh, I'll be rid of you soon enough," Rey hissed. "The second I see you again-"

“You’ll do what?” Ren interrupted. “Try to kill me with that power you can’t control?”

Rey prickled at that.

“When was the last time you used the Force without breaking something?” Ren asked. “When was the last time you could trust in your own strength without fearing you’ll kill the ones you love?”

The Force circled around her, the room growing darker. She hated this. She hated that not only couldn’t she control her own power, but that the Force kept throwing this *creature* into her path. Ren used to frighten her the first time he appeared. Now he just made her livid. “...I don’t need the Force to kill you,” she said coldly as a few instruments buckled around her. “Not when I can wire your ships to explode.”

Ren’s eyes widened at that. “The Singularity...”

It took a great deal of restraint for Rey not to gloat about it to his face. If she did, he would simply send every First Order ship to intercept them. Like it or not, she had to play the fool. “What’s that? Have you commissioned a new flagship for yourself?” she asked innocuously. “Well don’t worry. I can blow that one up too.”

Ren narrowed his eyes at her, before cutting the connection entirely and vanishing. Rey’s stomach tightened in knots. This wasn’t good. She whirled around to the comm channel and punched in Talon’s holofrequency. “Talon? Come in, this is Rey! We have a situation!”

Talon appeared on the holopanel, looking confused. “What’s going on?”

“I think the First Order knows we’re coming.”

“How?!”

“Kylo Ren appeared... he baited me,” Rey said.

“Dammit Rey!” Talon exclaimed, slamming a console she couldn’t see. “When this is over, you and I need to have a chat.”

“I know, I know!” Rey groaned. “I shouldn’t have let him get under my skin!”

“We’ll worry about it later. I gotta relay this to the fleet. Tell them to be ready for a fight the moment we drop. Just focus on the mission!”

“I’m working on it,” Rey said, cutting the transmission and returning to her bombs. She couldn’t lose focus now. That’s exactly what they wanted her to do. Lose focus. Make mistakes. Become unbalanced. “I got this. I can do this.”

“Generals, we’ve engaged the Singularity,” the Fleet Captain said over the holocom. “But the First Order has reinforced it. Word from Lord Talon is that Kylo Ren baited Lady Irus into revealing information.”

“What!?” Leia exclaimed.

“Ah, kriff,” Rose cursed. “How bad is the situation?”

“It’s not ideal, but we should be able to get to the weapon if we keep the pressure on,” the Captain assured her. “As long as no one pulls out any more surprises, we’ll get this done.”

“Understood,” Leia nodded. “Keep me posted on the situation. We have a squadron of fighters on route and they should meet your position in less than two hours.”

“Yes General!” the Captain nodded before cutting communications.

“That’ll complicate things,” Leia sighed, sitting back down in her chair. “If Ben is using his connection with Rey to bait her into giving away intel, there’s no telling what he could do with that kind of power.”

“That sounds more clever than what Ren is capable of,” Poe said, folding his arms.

“The worm has escaped certain death so many times that he’s finally managed to learn something,” Aliana murmured, pressing her fingers to her lips.

Finn and Leia gave her a concerned look. She was utterly quaking through the Force. It was a surprise nothing in the war room broke yet. “...Alie?”

“I’ve let him live for far too long,” Aliana whispered. “Now he’s adapted and is learning to exploit this connection for something other than gaslighting. Rey needs to be taught to close this connection the moment she returns. Reliably. Without needing me to do it for her. It’s the one thing she struggles with.”

“But haven’t her powers been unstable lately?” Rose asked.

“Shrouding is different,” Aliana said. “It’s internal rather than external. She can still meditate and seethe in the Dark Side. No, it has to be something internal that’s making her struggle with it.”

“Maybe she doesn’t *want* to close the connection,” Rose suggested.

Aliana snapped her head up, a livid glare piercing directly into the Admiral.

“No no, I don’t mean like that!” Rose amended. “What I mean is... Rey *likes* putting Ren in his place.”

“That is true,” Finn nodded. “We all got an eyeful of that on Crait. She was rubbing salt in his wounds like crazy.”

“The only reason he got away was because Rey spent so much time twisting the knife that the First Order was able to reposition their guns,” Leia said. “I was watching from the viewport. And it looks like he learned that was her biggest weakness.”

Aliana looked confused as she glanced back down at the comm channel, with updates on the battle coming through. “But... how would she develop that? She wasn’t like that on Ilum, where’d she get it?”

“You,” everyone said in unison.

The Dark Lady blinked owlishly. “M-Me!?”

“It’s the same story as Rey,” Poe said. “The only reason Ren got away after he fought you was because you kept messing around.”

“You could have simply killed him a hundred times over by now,” Rose added. “But you wanted to rub dirt in his eyes. You wanted him to see that to see that you were his superior. You wanted to humble him time and again.”

“And you’ve done this with others as well. Was there any reason to tell Mon Mothma that her friend was a Sith Lord before killing her? You never gave her the truth that she was a good person, you just let her die with what she thought was a horrifying revelation,” Leia said. “And from Rey’s own reports, you were doing the exact same thing in the Supremacy’s throne room. Your cruelty is one of *your* biggest weaknesses. One that Rey has adopted and the First Order is exploiting. Ben has learned that he just needs to show up and be pompous to paralyze the both of you.”

The War Room fell quiet after that, Aliana absolutely speechless. Her mind raced to account for every instance they all spoke of. Jakku. Her ship. The Supremacy. Crait. She searched for any discrepancy or qualifier and found nothing. They were right. She slumped against one of the consoles, feeling inexplicably winded. “*Kriff*,” she hissed.

Leia’s brow furrowed and she laid a hand on the Sith’s shoulder. “It’s alright. I’ve been able to tell for a while that swagger and threats were how you survived. But it’s becoming a vulnerability.”

Aliana tightened her fingers around the console, bitterness and shame continuing to stew around her.

Leia tried again, but from a different angle. “It’s become a *chain* .”

That did it. Aliana lifted her head slightly, giving Leia a look of surprise as her words turned over in her head. Soon after, tension bled from her shoulders, a held breath falling free from her lips. “I see,” she said, a degree of calm in her voice. “Well, we can’t have that going forward.”

Leia smiled and patted her shoulder. “Atta girl.”

Aliana stood up straight and punched in another holofrequency. “Talon, this is Amorosa. I’m sending a squad of light frigates to meet you in an hour. How long until you reach the target?”

“Thirty minutes,” Talon said.

“Good. From this point on, keep all long range communications clear. Short range radio and long range position feed updates only,” Aliana said. “And make sure the Republic plays nice.”

Rey had given control of the Fury to 2V and taken an escape pod to infiltrate the Singularity. The plan was straightforward. Plant the charges in the reactor core, and along certain critical systems. The focused explosion would crack the ship into multiple pieces and fry the internal systems, leaving little to salvage beyond scrap metal. The most important part was her own evacuation. A Republic escape craft was supposed to pick her up at the dorsal docking ramp just before the explosives went off. If everything went off without a hitch, she would get out alive. Worst case scenario, she would be caught in a three hundred kiloton explosion, and vaporized.

A part of her might have felt a small relief that she wouldn’t need an oxygen mask as she traversed the corridors of the Singularity. Alas, all that meant was that the ship was that much closer to being

fully operational. She needed to be quick. Stealth was particularly tricky. The entire ship was on high alert. Anyone she couldn't sneak past, she dispatched quickly and quietly. Alas, there always seemed to be three more for every officer she disposed of. Between regular patrols, ensigns and engineers swarming every corridor she attempted to walk through, she was all but certain the Force hated her.

She slipped into a turbo lift, though not before clamping a hand on the ensigns mouth and driving her lightsaber straight through his back. He fell limp and lifeless as she closed the door.

She punched in the floor for the reactor bay, setting a tricobalt charge just underneath the console. It would explode at a random height once she detonated them, throwing the Singularity into a roll. She slipped out on the reactor bay, driving her lightsabers through two Stormtroopers. A pang of guilt stabbed through her. Of all those in the First Orders ranks, the Stormtroopers were the least deserving of death. A part of her wished she could do something more to help them. See that they broke away like Jannah and Finn did. She knew she couldn't save all of them, so they saved those they could. Children. Deserters on the run. She just wished there was more she could do.

She rushed for the reactor core, and the console that controlled it's shielding. Opening it, she found the shielding covered under layers of encryption, but all of them were the same encryption that was on the comm signal. She stuck a computer spike into the access port and uploaded her own assault program. It worked. The computer was open. She opened the reactor shielding and rushed inside, setting several charges on the reactor itself, and along the rim of the chamber. Six charges were set, enough to knock out a small city and certainly enough to blast a hole through the side of a cruiser. A smile of pride threatened to creep on her lips. In a matter of hours, she had discovered, routed and ensured the destruction of a planet killer. Not with the Force, but with her own ingenuity. With her own tech and fast thinking, she ended Ren's latest scheme for galactic control before it even had a hope to begin.

'Not bad for a scavenger from nowhere.'

With the last charge set, she darted out of the reactor, heading back for the turbolift.

Only to find that it was already open, and a figure was standing there, holding her explosive. He was a tall man, his hair tied back in a slick ponytail. Though he wore the black robes of the Knights of Ren, he was bereft of any of the plate or armor that she'd seen them with up until this point. "Well well well," he said, tossing the tricobalt device into the air. "Got ourselves a little desert rat darting around the ship."

Icy stone settled in Rey's stomach. She hadn't even realized she already had drawn her lightsaber until it ignited. "Stand aside," she said through clenched teeth. "Or you'll end up like the other Knights I killed."

"Ah, yes. The other nights," he said, a sliver of venom in his voice. "The ones that were actually worth a damn. Unlike Ren."

"You all came from the same place," Rey sneered, drawing her lightsaber.

Ap'lek laughed and shook his head. "Oh, how I wish that were true," he said, planting his hands on his hips. "No... Ren was given special treatment because he was Skywalker's nephew. That 'mighty' bloodline gave him personal attention from the Master. The rest of us actually worked hard to learn, but Ren was given a free ride. Even now that hasn't changed." His lightsaber ignited, the blade of blood red pointed straight at her. "Were it not for you and your Sith pet, he wouldn't be

on that throne. The rest of us might have had a chance. But no. You just had to let that slimy piece of slag get away.”

“Apologies,” Rey said unapologetically, flourishing her blade. “I’ll correct that mistake right after I’m done killing the rest of you.”

She rushed forward, her lightsaber carving into the metal floor beneath them to send a flurry of sparks his way. He sidestepped the distraction, meeting her followup with a graceful parry. She stayed on the offensive, her strikes quick and merciless, meant to kill quickly. Each one was countered, shunted or strafed. “Lady Irus, you disappoint me,” he said, sidestepping a thrust. “I recall witnessing a storm of lightning to rival the old Emperor. Surely you’ve not been stagnating the last year.”

Rey’s free hand clenched into a tight fist, a surge of rage threatening to crackle out. “You want my lightning?” she asked, a second blade bursting to life on the other end of her hilt. “Earn it.” Her saberstaff spun a wheel of fire throughout the room before making contact with Ap’lek’s blade. She kept the pressure on, giving him as little room to slink away as she could.

The Knight watched each blade closely, waiting until the last minute to parry the one that came in for a strike. It was a trick to lightsaber combat that few mastered after the collapse of the Jedi Order, telling feints and flourishes from real attacks. Old Jedi used to spin their lightsabers like they were wind turbines to confuse and disorient the enemy, baiting out counters and attacks several times a second. Since the collapse of the Empire, few Force users fought this way save for the Sith. And Rey from the looks of it. Ap’lek twirled his lightsaber, catching a flurry of six strikes before leaping back and onto a console. As Rey moved to strike high, he threw the tricobalt device into her blade.

It ignited.

A flash of white overtook Rey’s vision, the concussive force a shock to her senses. She didn’t feel herself hit the far wall more than she felt the explosion strike her like a freighter. She fell onto the metal floor, the impact upsetting her cracked bones further. The shock brought her senses back, her vision blurry and her ears ringing. She didn’t know when, or how, but she could feel the fire and the shockwave battering against her being stopped by a thin barrier of air. The Force? Was that it? Yes, she vaguely recalled pulling the Force around her to shield herself from the blast.

Ap’lek, also taking shelter from the fireball behind the Force, chuckled. “Farewell, Lady Irus,” he said, though he knew that Rey couldn’t hear him. He slipped into an access tube and closed the blast shield behind him, making his way through the ship’s inner systems toward the escape pods. “Powerful device. The girl certainly knows her way around a workbench,” he mused.

Rey shook her head sporadically, trying to clear her vision and her thoughts. What happened? What was that flash of white that knocked blinded her. Why did-? Sound bled back into Rey’s world, the sound of a reactor filling her ears. She looked up, her sight clearing well enough to remind her where she was. Oh. Oh kriff. How long had she been incapacitated? Where did Ap’lek go? Were the charges still in place?

She sat up, and felt a surge of pain throughout her entire body. One that made her gasp and seize up. Something was broken, or perhaps it was the burns from the tricobalt explosion. She fumbled in her robes for her comlink and found it, before trying to crawl toward the Turbolift.

“Rey to evac,” she wheezed into her comlink as she scratched at the console for the bottom level. “I was hit with an explosion! Are you ready?”

There was silence over the comm for a moment before “...I’m sorry, Master Rey. But... we’re leaving.”

Rey’s eyes widened. Did she just hear that right? She couldn’t have. Her ears must still have been ringing. “What was that?”

“We’re pulling out,” the voice over the comm repeated. “Sorry Master Jedi. May the Force be with you.”

At that point, Rey went even paler. But- You can’t! I’m still down here! I need an evac!”

The comm remained silent.

“You gave your word you’d help us!” Silence. Rey sat against the wall of the turbolift in shock and silence. The Republic was pulling out. They weren’t going to wait for her. The Republic had betrayed her. That was the last thought she had before an explosion echoed overhead, there was a lurch, and the turbolift was ripped open, venting her into space.

Aliana and Finn doubled over just before word that the Singularity had been destroyed came through the comms. Amidst the cheering and celebrations of the Resistance, a feeling of unfathomable dread washed over the two of them. A feeling of fire, burning, pressure, and cold. They looked at each other in confusion and fear, before realization dawned on them. “Rey,” they said in unison.

Aliana scrambled for her comm. “Rey? Rey do you copy?” No response. “...Rey?” She and Finn looked at each other, eyes pinpricked with panic. As fast as she could, Aliana hailed another frequency. “Talon? Do you copy?”

“Right here boss,” Talon said, her voice strained.

“We can’t reach Rey. Where is she?”

“Isn’t she on the evac shuttle? It just jumped to Hyperspace.”

“She’s not answering her comm.”

There was a tense silence over the comms, while the cheering in the war room slowly came to stop. Everyone was taking notice of the fact that Aliana was decidedly not celebrating.

“What is it, General?” one soldier asked.

“We felt the explosion,” Aliana said, glancing to the soldier as her eyes started to water. “And Rey... she’s not answering her comm.”

The soldiers looked about one another, confusion and worry creasing their faces. “Wasn’t she supposed to get an evac?” another soldier asked.

“The evac’s not answering either,” Aliana said, punching in one last holofrequency. “2V?”

“Yes, Miss Alie?”

“Rey didn’t get her evac,” Aliana said, tears streaking down her face, making her mascara run.

“...Oh dear,” 2V said. “Not to worry, Miss Alie, I will begin scanning the debris field immediately! Surely a Jedi of Miss Rey’s strength won’t be too damaged.”

“P-Please,” Aliana choked out. “Please find her.”

A fresh pain ached in her chest. Bile threatened to rise up her throat and spill out her mouth. She braced herself against a nearby terminal, lest she fall to her knees and begin to weep. This pain. This hollow ache that cut more sharply than any lightsaber ever could. She had felt it once before. On Corellia. No. It couldn’t be the same. 2V was looking for her. There was still hope. It was a faint sliver of hope, but one she clung to nonetheless. What else did she have?

Nothing. And if 2V came back with nothing, all she would have would be vengeance.

And vengeance without something to move on to after you’ve had it was a hollow victory.

2V didn’t radio back, but the Fury touched down six hours later. Aliana rushed out to meet the ship, finding 2V rolling a stretcher down the ramp with a battered and bruised Rey laid out on it, oxygen tubes and bacta injectors hooked up to her face, arms and torso. “Is she-”

“She is alive, Miss Rey. But she is in a very serious condition,” 2V explained as Aliana followed along toward the infirmary. “She was vented into space, and it looks like she was hit with an explosion before then. Multiple ruptures, internal bleeding, and a shattered ribcage. I will need a team of surgeons. And get a crew to bring the cybernetic storage Miss Rey left in the ship.”

“Cybernetic storage?”

“Miss Rey devised several medical devices. I will need them.”

Against her better judgment, she looked back down at Rey. Her heart shattered anew at the state she was in. Her molars nearly cracked under the pressure of her own jaw as she fought to maintain control. She couldn’t freeze up. Not now. She looked to her left. “Poe?”

“I’ll help 2V get Rey to the medical bay,” he assured her with a nod.

Somewhat relieved, she turned to her right. “Finn?”

“Rose and I will get the stuff from the ship.”

“Thank you,” Aliana whispered, taking Rey’s hand and holding it tightly. “Is there anything I can do, 2V?”

“Just let me work, and trust me,” 2V said. “I replaced your entire spine and brain stem, didn’t I?”

“...Yeah, you did,” Aliana nodded. “Okay. I trust you.”

“That’s all I ask,” 2V said, a smile in his synthetic voice. “You may wish to get some rest, Miss Alie. You look quite exhausted.”

“I couldn’t possibly get any sleep now of all times,” Aliana whispered, bringing Rey’s hand to her lips and kissing her knuckles.

“Then perhaps it would energize you to know that according to radio logs, the Republic transport left her there,” 2V said. “They flew off without her, evidently under orders from the Chancellor.”

A beat of silence passed, and suddenly, blood that had run cold with fear began to boil. “...The Republic left her for dead?” she asked, her quiet tone contrasted against the fire burning in her eyes.

“Yes, Miss Alie. They did.”

Aliana looked down at Rey’s bruised face. The Republic left her there. They abandoned her when she needed them. This was more than harsh words and threats, this was a premeditated act of violence against her family. They were hoping she would die in that explosion. This was too close. She had nearly lost everything in that explosion. When Rey was vented into space, all she could think about was that she might lose her wife. The most important person in the world to her. She had nearly relived the worst day of her life all over. And all because of the Republic’s treachery. The First Order’s mad dash for more power. She almost wanted to disappear. To take her fleet and her family and let the two powers slay each other. But that wouldn’t keep them from being hunted. Both of them were content to throw everything possible at them until they destroyed the Sith and all who stood with her.

But not if she destroyed them first.

“It’s alright, sweetheart. You can rest now. I’ll take it from here,” she whispered. She let go of Rey’s hand and stood up, silently departing the hangar and heading for the war room. Leia followed after her, looking equal parts confused and concerned.

“Aliana?” she asked. “What are you doing?”

“This ends now,” Aliana said, punching in the holofrequency for the Galactic Senate chambers. The image of Lanevar Villecham appeared before them, looking quite annoyed.

“Sith,” he sneered. “The Senate is in session, and your interruptions are bothersome.”

“Good,” Aliana said coldly. “The Republic was supposed to provide evacuation from the Singularity after it was set to blow! You abandoned my wife to be blown into space!”

“I chose the Vrook’s crew over a Dark Jedi,” Villecham said dismissively. “It was a strategic decision, you understand.”

Leia and Poe slowly looked to Aliana. Her eyes had gone from their tranquil ruby red to a burning yellow as the Chancellor’s words stoked a fury within her that none of them had seen before. And which likely hadn’t been seen by anyone since Corellia. The Republic had a direct hand in venting her wife into space, nearly killing her. And she was *furious*.

“Alie, don’t,” Leia said softly.

Aliana didn’t listen. She lifted her hand and squeezed. The image of Villecham froze and reached for his throat, making strangled sounds as the Sith choked him from across the galaxy.

“Beg for your miserable life,” she seethed.

Villecham sputtered and gasped, stumbling forward against his podium, barely able to strangle out the words “You... will... provoke... war...”

“You’ve already brought war upon yourselves when you betrayed us. War is already here, and if I ignore this you will only bring more of it,” Aliana seethed, before a sinister, wicked smirk crossed her lips. “This is a strategic decision. You understand,” she said mockingly.

She turned her wrist, and the Chancellor’s neck snapped like a dry and brittle twig.

Aliana could hear the screams and panicked yells of the Senators as they watched their Supreme Chancellor murdered before their waking eyes by someone who wasn’t even there. It was such an intense show of power and fury, the likes of which made any comparison to the notoriously underhanded Sidious vanish from their minds.

Amorosa embraced it. Embraced the rumors and fear and turned them to her advantage. They so desperately wanted her to be a tyrant? She would give them a tyrant. She would give them something to haunt their nightmares, fearful that they would be the next one to die at her very whims. She would let the lesson sink in that she did not need to enter Republic space to destroy them, and that there wasn’t an Outer Rim hell far enough to hide them from her.

If they wanted to live in fear so badly, she would make every last waking moment of their lives an unbearable nightmare from which they would never wake.

“I would suggest you get to work electing a new Chancellor,” she said coldly to the Senate. “And pray this one doesn’t test my patience again.”

She deactivated the holocom and immediately began punching in the settings for a galaxy wide broadcast. Leia and Poe didn’t even have the time to ask what she was doing now before she started speaking again.

“This is a message to the First Order, and its autocratic rodent,” she said, planting her hands on the control panel. “I know that you’re a coward. I know that I haunt you. You have had two opportunities to kill me, and failed. So I’ve decided that you’ve tainted my family with your presence long enough. *I have waited long enough.* I will have my vengeance on you and every last living creature that stands with you!”

She stood up straight and tightened her armwraps. “And on the off-chance you’re a man, my entire fleet will be positioned around Naboo. Come. Bring your army, and die with some measure of dignity. Because regardless of what you do, you *will* die. And the last gasp of the Jedi Order will be under the heel of my boot!”

May the Force Serve You Well

“How long until the First Order arrives?” Aliana asked as the base scrambled to get the rest of the patrol fleets into hyperspace.

“Four days,” Rose explained. “The rest of our ships should beat them there by a few hours.”

Aliana’s challenge to the First Order had put the Resistance and the Sith Fleet into high gear. The Admirals and Commanders were gearing their wings up and preparing for battle, while most of High Command remained behind on Oddessen to direct things remotely and be a survival contingency should they lose. Of High Command, General Organa, Admiral Ackbar, Vice Admiral Holdo and Commander Co Connix were remaining behind, while General Amorosa, Admiral Tico, Commander Dameron and Commander Dameron were among those fighting on the ground.

The Republic had refused to join in the battle, declaring the Resistance and Sith Fleet to be rogue terrorist groups after Aliana killed the Chancellor and threatened the Senate. But in their place, some military wings of the Republic fleet went rogue and pledged their allegiance to the Resistance, along with a large wing of ships from civilian freighters and mercenaries. Aliana’s tendency to rally the common people of the galaxy, often ignored by the political maneuvering of oligarchs, had once again paid off.

Though it was a frightening time, most of the Resistance was pleased that the year and a half long stalemate of skirmishes was coming to an end, even if there was a chance that they might lose.

Queen Tahraya had been more than amenable to the challenge, committing her own fighter squadrons, ships and Theed’s many state of the art medical facilities. Her advisors, by contrast, were far less enthusiastic to have their world be ground zero for a battle they did not ask for so soon after their Queen chose to secede from the Republic. They stressed to Tahraya profusely their unease with this idea, even if they couldn’t overrule her decision. Especially not with Senator Marek’s backing. With the advance warning, civilians had been transported off world and the city was fortified for battle, with contingencies that had been placed sixty years ago by the late Queen Amidala after the first blockade. Theed, it turned out, was an ideal battleground for whoever held it.

And it was currently held by the Sith.

“Are Finn and Jannah ready for battle against Force users?” Aliana asked.

“Last I checked, they’d completed their exercises and Rey gave them the green light before leaving for the Singularity,” Rose explained.

“Good,” Aliana said, throwing her cloak over her shoulders and drawing up her hood. “I have their lightsabers ready. Can you manage the rest of the ships?”

“Yeah I got it,” Rose smiled, laying a hand on Aliana’s shoulder. “You doing okay?”

“Yeah, I think so,” Aliana said with a stiff nod. “Just... Pre battle jitters, I suppose. I’ve got more than my own life and livelihood riding on this battle. My fleet. Naboo. Hell, the fate of the whole galaxy is riding on this. All because I chose to take the war into my own hands. If I botch this-”

“You won’t,” Rose interjected, kneading Aliana’s shoulder. “That’s just the pressure talking. We’re going to win this. I promise.”

Aliana smiled and laid her hand over Rose’s. Though it mattered little in terms of the outcome of the battle, Rose’s reassurance soothed her own nerves. “Thanks, Rose. That... means a lot.”

Rose’s smile widened and she pulled her hand away. “I’ll get the ships ready. I think I know what you have to do right now.”

Aliana nodded. “Yeah.”

“Tell Rey I said hi.”

“I will.”

Aliana sat beside Rey’s bed in the medical bay, holding tightly to the Jedi’s hand. She had been conscious a few times, but 2V kept her sedated until he could operate properly. She’d been hooked up to a circulator and an oxygenator to keep her blood pumping. The prognosis from 2V had been that Rey had protected herself with the Force, but time and injuries meant it wasn’t perfect and the vacuum of space had ruptured many blood vessels and irreparably damaged her heart. 2V was planning to operate to replace it with a cybernetic heart very soon, while bacta was healing the damage to her lungs.

There was no way around it. She had to sit this one out.

“It’s going to be hard not having you there,” Aliana whispered, squeezing her hand. “We’re a team. You should be there to see that bastard burn.”

She lifted her other hand and ran her fingers through Rey’s hair. Seeing her weak, bruised and battered like this was an alien feeling. She hadn’t seen Rey this vulnerable since she was brought to tears by the visions on Ahch To. She didn’t like it. Rey had become so powerful and capable and to see her injured like this pulled at protective instincts that had gone a long time without being awakened. She was back to where she was when Rey was taken to Starkiller base. Terrified that she wouldn’t make it out, guilt for getting her into this, only this time she couldn’t assuage them by rushing to her rescue.

“I’ll kill him,” she promised. “And I’ll break this bond. You have my word, *nuyak nulis*.”

“Alie?”

Aliana looked up, seeing Leia at the door. “...General,” she said quietly. “I’m just taking a moment before I ship out.”

“I understand,” Leia said, stepping inside. “I wanted to talk to you before you left. Rose said you were here.”

“What is it?”

“It’s about my son,” Leia said quietly, sitting down beside her.

Aliana sighed and rubbed her eyes. Not again. Not on the eve of battle. “Leia, it’s very late to be making a plea for redemption.”

“I’m not,” Leia said, laying a hand on Aliana’s shoulder. “I know that ship has sailed, and that even if it hadn’t you would be the last person to ask.”

Aliana looked up, quietly surprised. Had Leia really accepted that nothing was bringing her son back? It felt almost too good to be true, and yet here she was confessing to it. “Then... what do you want?”

Leia was quietly for a moment, and Aliana could see the beginning of tears welling in the corner of her eyes. “I wanted to ask you... to not decapitate him,” she said. “And... to bring me back the body.”

Aliana blinked. That settled it in her mind. Leia really had accepted that her son was going to die. She wasn’t asking for a hand to be extended or mercy, just the chance to grieve for what might have been when everything was said and done. It was a surprisingly humble request. More so than she’d come to expect from a Jedi.

“...I can do that,” she nodded.

Leia let out a small sigh, and the hand on Aliana’s shoulder slid down to pat the Sith’s hand. “Thank you,” she said, her voice cracking ever so slightly.

Aliana nodded. “You’re welcome,” she said, turning her attention back to Rey. “I guess I need to get ready to leave...”

“There’s one more thing,” Leia said, squeezing her hand. “And... I’m sorry, but I can’t keep quiet about it anymore.”

Aliana turned a confused look back to Leia. “Keep quiet about what?”

“Luke,” Leia explained. “Rey never told you *how* he died.”

“She just said she felt him die through the Force,” Aliana said, her brow furrowing. Was there more to his death that she didn’t know?

“That... wasn’t entirely honest,” Leia explained. “When you were comatose, the Force tried to... claim you. I’m not entirely certain what it was, but Rey tried to save you by giving you some of her essence. But she couldn’t, not without killing herself to do it.”

Aliana’s eyes widened. No. She wasn’t going where she thought she was going. “Leia, what happened?”

“...It was Luke,” Leia explained. “He gave his life so you could live.”

Aliana felt a stone drop in her stomach. Her mind raced backwards through time, scouring her memories for any trace of what Leia was talking about. Nothing vivid or clear came, no matter how hard she searched. She was teetering on the edge of oblivion until, suddenly she wasn’t. She thought that was just dumb luck, but what Leia was claiming... Why would Rey lie about that? “...Why tell me otherwise?”

“She didn’t want that knowledge to... sour your vengeance,” Leia said.

At once, the weight in the pit of Aliana’s stomach faded and was replaced by a feeling of relief. Oh, Rey had just been looking out for her. Not wanting to ruin something that was so important to her.

She cast her eyes back to Rey and smiled. "...That's very sweet of her. But it doesn't change anything."

Now it was Leia's turn to be confused. "It doesn't? Most would consider saving your life--"

"Saving my life doesn't bring my mother back. It doesn't give me back the childhood that ten years of drifting through the Outer Rim stole from me," Aliana explained, taking Rey's hand in both of hers and kissing it softly. "I didn't just lose my mother that day, I lost a lot more than that. I had to grow up at fourteen. There's an adolescence I never got to enjoy, training I never saw, skills I never got to learn without someone to teach them to me. I had to piece everything together on my own, and I can't go back and do it all again."

She looked up from Rey and toward Leia, her eyes burning with the Dark Side.

"That's ten years of fear, grief, misery and stunted growth that can't be undone. I'm going to have to live with that in some form or another for the rest of my life," Aliana said. "What your brother and son did to me was an act of violence that goes a lot deeper than simply the death of a loved one. Everything about who I am has been shaped in some way by it. It's the reason I don't trust the Republic. It's the reason I'm so frightened all the time. It's the reason my eyes are always red. You can't take back that kind of violence. Skywalker owed me his blood, but there's not enough blood in a body to pay that kind of debt."

Leia was thrown by that. In truth, there was nothing necessarily... unexpected by Aliana's words. The Sith had been notoriously unforgiving when it came to violence enacted against her family. The late Chancellor learned that rather quickly. On reflection, she wasn't sure why she or Rey had believed knowing what Luke had done would make a difference.

Because Aliana had demonstrated herself to be a good person at heart, she realized. And she had simply imposed her ideas of what a good person would do onto the Sith without thinking about whether she would actually do it.

"I see," Leia said quietly.

Aliana stood up and adjusted her belt, securing her lightsaber on her new tunic. "I've lingered long enough. It's time to end this war and put the First Order in the grave."

Aliana and her primary ground team was on board the capital ship of the Sith Fleet, the *Dromund Kaas*, as it streaked through Hyperspace. The Dromund Kaas was a masterwork of engineering designed by Rey herself and built by the Fleet's dockworkers over the last year. Multi-core shielding, thick duranium armor, and overcharged thrusters made it fast and durable. Rey had swapped out the standard turbolasers for Starfighter lasers and a single rail cannon. While this meant it could only really hurt one large ship at a time, it could tear through it like a hot knife through butter.

The Admirals commended Rey on such a powerful design, but remarked that a crew would have to be insane to pilot such a single-minded frigate.

Luckily for Aliana, Nar Shaddaa pirates were about as crazy as they came, and were itching to bring the Dromund Kaas onto its maiden voyage.

“All systems green, Dark Lady,” the tactical officer said, “It seems the unfinished parts of the ship were the superfluous ones. War room, diplomacy, captain’s chambers, the like.”

“Leave it to my wife to prioritize,” Aliana smiled, sitting down in the command chair beside Rose. “As soon as the ground forces are deployed, the ship is yours Admiral.”

“Oh mama, I can’t wait to put this ship through its paces!” Rose said excitedly. “I’m going to blow the wings off the *Caedus* and let Hux vent into space!”

“Just don’t get it blown up,” Aliana chuckled. “This ship is Rey’s baby.”

“Oh no, guess if I do you’ll have to get her a real baby,” Rose smirked.

“You know I just might.”

“Dark Lady, Lady Talon has sent a report. Early scouting ships have been seen in Naboo’s sector space,” the comms officer said. “The First Order is scouting them out.”

“How far out are we?” Aliana asked.

“Six hours, my Lady.”

“We’ll beat the Supremacy there. In the meantime, coordinate with the Admiral,” Aliana said, standing up and heading for the elevator. “I’m going to give my lightsaber another check and meditate until we arrive.”

She left the bridge, but as soon as she stepped into the elevator she was immediately joined by Finn and Jannah.

“Alie, we need to talk to you,” Finn said.

“Everything alright?” Aliana asked, tightening the wraps on her arms.

“Should be. We just have a... proposition to run by you.”

“About?”

“Our people,” Jannah said. “The Stormtroopers. We’ve been doing our best to bottleneck the First Order’s attempts to raise more troops by raiding their training camps. But there’s still an innumerable amount of soldiers trained from birth to be killers. Who weren’t given another choice at life.”

“I am aware,” Aliana said, brow furrowing slightly.

“But they still have a choice, even if they don’t realize it,” Finn said. “Jannah and I. We both made that choice. We turned away from the First Order.”

“If Finn and my squad could turn away from them, there’s a chance others could too,” Jannah said. “They just... need to know there’s another way. If we could just reach out to them, they might see that.”

Something uncomfortable settled in Aliana’s stomach, their meaning finally coming clear. “You’re suggesting a stormtrooper rebellion *now* of all times?”

“I know it’s last minute, but they’re victims. They were taken from birth and trained to do one thing,” Finn said. “They deserve mercy, don’t they?”

“That’s a hard question to answer when they’re going to be shooting at you either way, Finn,” Aliana frowned. “I sympathize, but we have a war to win.”

“Alie, please. There has to be something we can do,” Finn urged.

A sigh escaped the Sith, her mind pulled in two directions. Pragmatism clashed with optimism. The promise of what could be struggled viciously against the less than ideal reality of their situation. What sounded like a promising strategy could just as easily turn into a blunder that could cost them the battle if handled poorly. She was tempted to dismiss the notion completely. She very nearly did. Alas, she could see the earnestness in Finn and Jannah’s eyes. The hopeful glint in their gazes. Even if she didn’t truly mean it as such, saying no came with the implicit statement that the lives of victims of the First Order War Machine, which they were, was not worth saving over a single battle.

She pulled in a deep breath, cleansing her mind of the buzzing conflict. She just needed to consider all the factors. The known elements of the coming battle. “Alright let’s see... the battle is defensive mostly, which means we’re not going to be advancing,” she murmured. “I can spare a squad of twenty to board the Supremacy and tell Rose to ease off the firepower on it. But I can’t tell the ground forces to pull their punches, or pull back the ships. It’s too dangerous and risky. Victims or not, they are trained to kill on sight.”

“So what does that mean for us?” Finn asked.

“It means you can have free reign of the Supremacy and try to rally a revolution,” Aliana said. “But the longer you take, the fewer Stormtroopers there will be. That’s the best I can do.”

Finn glanced at Jannah. “What do you think?”

Jannah pursed her lips. It wasn’t great, but it was better than they were hoping. Aliana was giving them an opening to see if this would work, but wasn’t willing to risk the lives of her own people on a hunch. “...I’d say we take it. A small chance is still a chance.”

“Good. You’ll board after the first wave,” Aliana said. “Once Solo is on the ground, the two of you take Rey’s stealth shuttle up to punch through the Supremacy.”

A warm smile spread on Finn’s face. “Thank you, Alie,” I promise you won’t regret this!”

“I’ll hold you to that,” Aliana said, unable to hide the fondness in her voice. “Now come on. Follow me.”

“Where to?” Jannah asked.

“We’re gonna find an empty spot in the ship where I can test your swordsmanship,” Aliana said. “You both are flipping the script on a very important battle. I need to know you’re ready.”

Aliana ducked under Jannah and ran the training saber through her midsection, winding her and sending her to the floor. She smiled, feeling a slight strain in her legs as she rose to her feet. Both of them put up a very intense fight; enough so to make her work up a sweat. Despite losing to her,

they were more than ready. “Excellent,” she said, taking their training sabers. “In terms of lightsaber combat, there’s nothing else I can teach you save for new forms. I’m sure Rey would say you’ll make fine Jedi.”

Finn grinned wide, helping Jannah to her feet. “Well, I can safely say I like our odds now.”

Jannah matched Finn’s smile with her own even as she nursed her midsection. “I’ll feel better about our odds when my stomach stops tingling.”

Aliana smiled as she pulled two lightsabers off her belt. She handed the first one to Finn. “Finn, here’s your lightsaber. I changed the crystal to a Damind crystal. It gives a more stable blade and makes it more suited to deflecting blaster bolts.”

His eyes widened as he accepted the hilt from Aliana pressing the switch, a solid beam of green light shot upward, bathing them in an emerald glow. “Oh. Oh I’m gonna like this,” he said.

Aliana smiled and turned to Jannah. “Jannah, I hope you’ll indulge me in a little Sith tradition,” she said, holding out the other lightsaber. “I made this for you. I based the design off your blaster bow.”

The lightsaber in her hand was a faint gold color, a telltale sign of electrum. There was a rubber grip in the center, and grip ridges over the choke on the hilt. The emitter itself was shielded with a small external plate. It was a very simple, elegant design. Trying to hide her eagerness, Jannah accepted the hilt, taking in the feeling of it in her hand before flicking it on. A golden beam shot from the emitter, the very hum of the blade feeling... powerful. One of the most powerful things she had ever held. “...Thank you,” she said with a slight rasp in her voice. By the Force, was she actually getting choked up. “I will do my best to be worthy of it.”

“You already are,” Aliana said with a smile, clapping Jannah on the shoulder. Their moment was very brief, and was shattered quickly when the alert lights came on.

“Attention! All hands, battle stations! We’re due to arrive in Naboo in forty five minutes!” came Rose’s voice over the intercom. *“General Beniko, report to the bridge. You are being hailed.”*

“Duty calls,” Aliana said with a slight huff. “You both ready?”

“Ready as we’ll ever be,” Finn said with a nod, clipping his hilt to his belt. “You?”

“Not in the slightest, but I can fake it,” Aliana laughed, pulling the both of them into a hug. They broke away shortly after and headed for their stations, with Aliana heading directly for the bridge. The officers were rushing to their posts, and every screen was lit up with status reports that Aliana couldn’t even begin to comprehend. “Report.”

“The First Order’s first frigates have dropped out of Hyperspace beyond the range of our ships. They’re staying back, gathering their forces,” Rose explained. “The Sith Fleet is sixty percent rallied, with ships still coming in. We’ll be in full force before they are.”

“And who’s hailing me?”

“Take a wild guess.”

Aliana hummed and stepped up to the holoterminal. “Patch the rat through.” Rose nodded, pressing a button on the terminal. A beat later, the visage of Kylo Ren flickered to life.

“Amorosa,” Ren greeted. “I received your challenge. Rather bold, I must say.”

“Well I figured we’d dawdled enough and it was time to swat this gnat,” Aliana sneered. “I wasted a year recovering from the Supremacy and I’ve waited long enough to rip your pathetic soul out of my wife’s head and send you home to Mommy in a body bag.”

Eyes black as coal narrowed at Aliana. Surprisingly enough, his response came when he simply lifted his hand. As he did, his lightsaber floated just above his palm. A second later, a plate came off the hilt, then another. Then another. Within a moment or so, the lightsaber was completely disassembled, its components orbiting around its red kyber crystal. “Through our Dyad, Rey and I have both become immeasurably powerful,” he said evenly. “Through each other, our power now rivals that of the ancient Sith Lords you revere.”

He twisted his wrist slightly, wires and other components suddenly returning to their place around the crystal. Aliana watched as the lightsaber reassembled itself in Ren’s hands. As the final piece locked into place, he gripped it tightly, a blade of blood red shooting from the emitter. “The difference is, when she lost control, I only gained more.”

“Congratulations, Solo. You reassembled your lightsaber,” Aliana said dryly, sarcastically clapping her hands. “You’ve finally graduated to a literal child’s technique. Good job.”

“More than your dear wife can do with all her power,” Ren bit back calmly. “She couldn’t even beat one of my lesser knights and failed to protect herself from the vacuum of space.” He tilted his head over his shoulder, seemingly looking at the ensigns aboard the bridge. “I, on the other hand...”

With a single twitch of his face, one of the officers stopped in his tracks, a sickening crack filling the room before he fell on the ground, dead. Aliana whirled around to see his body drop to the floor, before turning a murderous glare to Ren. “Just for that, I’m going to peel the flesh from your bones before I kill you,” Amorosa snarled. “Cut transmission, get his disgusting face off my bridge!” Before his visage flickered out of existence, Aliana was treated to the sight of his sickening smirk.

Hands on the bridge were already rushing to collect the body. Aliana could feel the fear beginning to fester around her, raising her own hackles in turn. “Lovely,” Rose sighed, pinching the bridge of her nose. “The battle hasn’t even started and we already have a casualty.”

“The First Order will suffer many more,” Aliana said as the ship dropped out of Hyperspace above Naboo. The Sith Fleet was gathered, and in the distance more First Order ships were dropping out of Hyperspace as well. “Ground forces?”

“Already in position,” Rose said.

“Good. I’m taking the shuttle down,” Aliana said, turning on her heel and storming for the elevator. “The ship is yours, Rose. May the Force serve you well.”

“Alie, wait!” Aliana stopped, turning to look back at her. “Just... promise me something, okay?” Rose asked, the lines on her face creasing harder with anxiety. “Please just stop with the taunting. Stop with the showboating. Just put an end to that kriffing menace and be done with it. Please.”

Aliana nodded. “I promise, Rose. No more kriffing around. He dies today.”

Rose relaxed slightly and nodded. "Thank you."

Aliana stood on the steps of Theed Palace, with most of the ground forces gathered in the courtyard. The First Order fleet had launched its shuttles under the cover of starfighters, and news came from overhead that the first few warning shots were being fired. It was time. "2V. Patch me through to everyone," she said.

"Stand by," 2V said, a beat of static following suit. "...You're live, Miss Alie."

Aliana took a deep breath and spoke. "Troops. Friends. I know my decision to put everything on a single battle wasn't popular with everyone. I know there are many among you wondering if I made the right decision. But the entire First Order war machine is here. We have the chance to end this now, rather than drag this out through attrition warfare over what could be years."

She started pacing back and forth, occasionally sparing glances to the ships in orbit.

"The Republic isn't going to help us. They let the First Order run unchecked in the Outer Rim for years. They helped create this monster. We have to put it in the dirt today. The First Order is a wrench in any other goals to make the galaxy a better place for everyone. The Hutts, the Senate, the Corporate Systems, all of them are able to hide behind the chaos the First Order sows. And they are nothing but chaos. They are an unhinged cult of Vader impersonators convinced they have the right to rule the galaxy because their grandparents said they could. They will not surrender, they will not negotiate, they desire nothing but absolute obedience from everyone in the galaxy."

Aliana stopped her pacing and looked up directly at the shadow of the *Supremacy*, the massive command center of the entire First Order, flanked by the *Caedus* and the *Krayt*, massive dreadnoughts that had the power of an entire fleet.

"Show them no mercy, for they will show you none in return." She tapped the button on her comlink, closing the channel. She said all she needed to. All that was left was the battle.

"Good speech," came a voice behind her. "I got chills."

Aliana turned to see Finn and Jannah coming down the steps. Almost immediately, something about Finn caught her eye. Atop his rather modest, almost uniform attire was a rather regal looking purple cloak hanging almost entirely off one shoulder. Gold script lined the edges, adding more to the idea of it being a royal garment. "Well you're looking snazzy."

"Gift from the Queen," Finn said, smiling as he adjusted his cowl. "She was insistent. Tried giving Jannah one too."

"I'm good with what I got," Jannah said with a slight laugh. "Why mess with perfection?"

Aliana giggled softly. She needed the levity in these brief moments before the battle began. She turned her gaze back to the courtyard, where everyone was getting into defensive positions. And where the first wave of Stormtroopers were already visible between buildings.

She drew her lightsaber, along with Finn and Jannah, and pointed it toward the enemy.



“Forward!” she yelled, the Force amplifying her voice to tear across the city.

“Our first wave of ground forces have landed,” Phasma announced as she stepped onto the bridge of the *Caedus*, the primary dreadnought in the fleet. The Supremacy being disabled in the Battle of Crait taught the First Order that a single command center was a weakness. Instead the Supremacy was supplemented by two dreadnoughts, the *Caedus* and the *Krayt*.

“Good,” Hux said, watching the fleets converge on one another. “Send the Knights with the second wave. Theed is too valuable a prospect to give up.”

“What information do we have on the Queen’s location?” Kylo Ren asked, not looking away from the viewport.

“Scans show that her royal flagship has not left the planet,” Phasma said. “She may very well still be in Theed.”

“If we find her. Shoot to kill,” Ren commanded. “She is the only thing connecting Naboo to Amorosa. If she dies, the planet will fold to our will.”

“Theed is a democratic monarchy,” Phasma corrected. “If Tahraya dies, the Naboo will elect a new Queen. And we will still need to take the planet from the Sith.”

“With Tahraya dead, we can impose a puppet monarch,” Ren clarified. “One who will promise safety for Naboo and its people.”

“And what of you, Supreme Leader?” Hux asked dryly. “You’re not actually going to go down there and duel Amorosa, are you?”

“I am,” Ren said with a curt nod, turning on his heel and walking down the bridge.

Hux sighed and rolled his eyes. “He’s walking into a trap.”

“Hasn’t he become more powerful because of this chain with the Jedi?” Phasma asked.

“Power hasn’t made a difference before,” Hux countered, looking back out at the fight. “Our Supreme Leader continues to underestimate the Sith, and that will lead to his downfall. She has already proven herself to be formidable. Refusing to accept that is a mistake.”

Though her expression was unreadable behind her helm, there was an unmistakable sense of unease about her. Because Hux wasn’t wrong. Amorosa and her Jedi consort had proven themselves Ren’s superior multiple times at this point. To imagine this would be different was the definition of insanity. “...What do you suggest?”

“The First Order survived the death of Snoke. We will survive this,” Hux said. “We just have to appoint a new leader in his absence.”

“Do you have any candidates?” she pressed.

Hux’s smirk was positively vile. “I can think of a few.”

Aliana leapt off the barricade, letting out a Force-amplified shriek that made the Stormtroopers cower and clutch their helmets before being swept away by a repulse when she landed. Aliana’s Force Screams had the effect of demoralizing the enemy and inspiring her own people. A sniper on the high wall was blasted from his perch by a rocket overhead, and Aliana seized the debris with the Force before hurling it at the dazed troopers. Within a breath, a whole battalion crumpled and perished, cementing their ground advantage.

Above their heads, chaos had fully erupted. The sky rained turbolasers, stressing the shield generators all over Theed. Fighters cast over the city like a swarm of insects while gathering clouds nearly consumed the cruisers on both sides. Natural light was nowhere to be seen on the battlefield. Just energy bolts, straining domes of light and fires erupting in the city streets. It was unlikely the sun was going to shine on Theed before the battle was won.

“How we looking?” Aliana called out, looking behind her to see Finn dueling with a Stormtrooper. She watched him practically moving in slow motion, doing little than block the other’s stun baton and offering half hearted counter attacks. A disapproving frown pulled at her lips. Finn was pulling his punches.

A screech was heard overhead and Aliana turned her eyes skyward to see a TIE Silencer tearing over the city. It was time. “Finn!” she called out, shooting a bolt of lightning into the Stormtrooper’s chest. “Get Jannah and your squad and get to the Supremacy!” then she turned her eyes to another soldier. “Captain! Push the troopers out of the courtyard and fight through the city!”

“Yes, ma’am!” the Captain nodded, pressing the comlink on her wrist and relaying those orders to the others.

“Alie!”

Aliana turned back to see Finn decidedly not running off to find Jannah, but towards her. “Are you sure you don’t need us to stay?”

“I’m sure. I can handle that greasy little wamprat,” Aliana said with a grin. Alas, her confidence did not ease the conflict that lined Finn’s face. Because that wasn’t what he was conflicted about. Her expression warmed, placing a hand on his shoulder. “I know this plan is important to you,” she said, her voice almost lost by the chaos around them with how softly she spoke. “You and Jannah want to save them. It would be wrong of me to stop you from doing that. I still think this is reckless, but I trust you.”

Finn smiled and pulled Aliana into a very tight hug. “Thank you.”

Aliana wrapped her arms around him and held him tightly. Though they hadn’t gotten a chance to really spend much time together after Starkiller Base, Finn was just as important to her as Rey was. She spent a long time making sure he was ready for this because she wanted him to come back safely. “Love you, Finn,” she said.

He felt his smile more than he saw it. “Love you too,” he said, pulling away enough to look her in the eyes. “Kick his ass, yeah?”

“You know it,” Aliana said with a grin.

With a laugh and a clap on Aliana’s shoulder, Finn was off. With him and the soldiers pushing out into the city, the courtyard grew quieter and quieter. This was it. Finally, after waiting for so long, vengeance would be hers. She deactivated her lightsaber and retreated back up the steps to Theed palace, through the grandiose halls and to the Throne Room, where she sat in Tahraya’s throne and waited. He would come to her. She knew that much. His ship had already touched down on the planet. And he would come to her alone. His ego would not allow for anything less. Only he would have the glory of killing the Dark Lady of the Sith. She could feel the anticipation crackling off of his presence as he drew closer. It felt like static in the air.

A thunderous boom nearly shook the entire palace. If Aliana had to guess, Ren had just blasted the palace doors off their frame on his way to her. A bit dramatic, she thought. That door wasn’t even locked. That he was so eager to finally fight her, he couldn’t wait for-

A near deafening crack filled Aliana’s ears as the doors to the Throne Room were bashed open by a similar shockwave, Kylo Ren’s silhouette marching in from the assaulted entrance.

“At last,” she said, drumming her fingers on the arm of the throne before standing up. “I destroyed your master. Now I’ll break *you*.”

Kylo Ren responded with an outstretched hand, another volley of twisted rage sent flying at Aliana.

She dug her heels in, holding her own hand aloft and conjuring a shield of will to meet his assault. It struck her defence like a freighter, wanting nothing more than to shatter her strength of mind and body. To reduce her to splintered bone and amorphous gore. She felt that intent, that hatred. Despite that intent, however, her shield held firm, his assault not even sending her back an inch. Alas, the

infrastructure could not boast the same, the walls behind her cracked and shuddered and a few windows shattered completely.

“Oh. Someone’s serious,” Aliana said, tauntingly.

A spinning blade of crimson suddenly filled Aliana’s vision. A blink later, she brought her own lightsaber up in a span of a thought. In a blur of motion, she parried the weapon, sending it flying backward into the sky. Kylo Ren caught it at the peak of his jump, Aliana preparing for a familiar downswing cleave in his descent. Instead, he landed just a pace behind her, giving her a heartbeat of time to spin on the ball of her foot and shunt away an otherwise decisive thrust.

Another strike came. Then another. And another. Each time, Aliana had less than a breath to respond in kind. Each strike was faster than before. More precise. No attack carried the brunt of his raw might this time. They were not would-be killing blows. They were probing attacks. Calculated strikes meant to prod at her defenses. Gauging her skill and looking for an opening, his attacks a curious blend of Makashi and Djem So. It was nearly disarming all on its own. He had just attempted to overwhelm her with the sheer power of the Force not a moment ago. Now he favored speed and precision over raw might. Did he truly just change tactics on the spot, or was the change premeditated, meant to catch her off guard.

Regardless, it made Aliana groan internally. The bastard actually learned to fight for once. Kriffing hell.

Her own blade spun in her hand, knocking Ren’s advance aside and arcing to cleave him in twain with one fluid motion. He shunted to the side, his riposte following swiftly after only to be met with a breakneck counter. A smile returned to her face. It had perhaps taken a moment longer than it should have, but she found her footing. She understood what kind of duel this would be now. In all of lightsaber duels throughout history, many of them, the vast majority, were settled within a blink. Whether one by skill, sheer willpower, or dumb luck exposing a weak point for a tenth of a second, most lightsaber duels were over before they even begun.

Alas, there were those rare instances in history where this was not the case. Where it was closer to a marathon. Knowing that, Aliana’s smile grew even further. A marathon, she could do.

Taking a knee briefly, Ren drove a hand into the ground, setting forth a wave through the force in all directions. Aliana vaulted backwards, the arc of her jump allowing the wave to just miss her. He was trying to disrupt her footing. A useful tactic, but hardly unheard of. All the same, he did not wait long to close the distance between them once more. With every strike, practiced as it might have been, it became all the clearer that he did not want to give Aliana a moment to breathe, a moment to think. He needed her to be on the back foot, hoping the increased pressure would get her to inevitably crack. He was risking nothing.

Aliana wondered just how much of himself Ren was revealing to her through this battle. A seasoned duelist could tell much about their opponent in the heat of battle. With every strike, they knew that little bit more. Not just of their skill, but through their connection of the Force. With every shockwave of power, or breakneck test of her own defenses, Aliana saw an increasingly clear picture of him. The power that he ordinarily allowed to spill off of him in droves tightly compact inside him, pacing himself for the long game despite his constant assault. The scope of his power was matched only by Rey, who was a similar wellspring in the Force. Whereas her wife was a blazing inferno, however, Ren’s power was closer to an overflowing font of blackened oil, meant to

consume and drown all around it. Beat by beat, she saw deeper into that cold pool. Its scale. Its ebb and flow. Its struggle.

Struggle?

Yes. She saw it. She could see how the depths of his power seemed to fight against his own will. The power resisted the spirit. There was conflict in Ren, but that conflict was not his own. Ha. Got him. Their lightsabers screeched apart, sending red sparks to ignite the curtains. Ren hadn't been lying when he said the bond with Rey had made him stronger. But he was still slipping. Still sloppy. He may have trained since their last fight, but Aliana was still a fully trained, fully realized Sith Lord.

"I can feel her resisting you," Aliana said, putting distance between them. "Your power is slipping."

"Your taunting is just trying to unbalance me," he said flatly. "It won't work."

He lunged, countered, and riposted in quick succession, barely giving Aliana time to roll her eyes. No monologue. He was desperate to block her out. He didn't want to internalize a damn thing. It would seem, at the very least he came prepared. Ah well. Aliana was no quitter.

"You're banking on your growing power filling the gaps in your training," Aliana observed. "But how efficient can you be when you have to wrangle the Force the way you are and fight me at the same time?"

"Quiet!" Ren snarled, shunting Aliana's lightsaber and driving his foot into her stomach. Aliana was knocked off her feet and hit the broken windowsill, falling back and out onto the ledge below. Ren jumped down after her, determined to end this for good.

First the Sith, and then her Jedi pet.

You Never Find Peace. You Make Peace

An explosion rocked the *Dromund Kaas* as Rose's readouts indicated that Nihilus Wing had lost another three fighters. The *Caedus* and the *Krayt* were hammering the fleet and providing such dense cover to their frigates that the Sith Fleet was struggling just under the firepower of these Dreadnoughts alone, let alone the *Supremacy*.

"Admiral! There's a comm from Lady Talon!" one of the officers said. "She's saying to hold fire on the *Supremacy*! A boarding party has just landed!"

"What!?" Rose balked. "There was no boarding party in the attack plan! What is going on!?"

"She said Captain Dameron has a new plan of attack," the officer said.

"Oh, for the love of- Put her on holo!"

The officer nodded, pressing a button on a terminal and bringing up Talon's visage in a bloom of static.

"Admiral Tico, is this important?" Talon asked with exasperation. "I'm on route to flank a nasty looking Ren b-"

"What's this I hear about Finn boarding the *Supremacy*?" Rose asked.

"Finn and Jannah appealed to the Dark Lady about inciting a rebellion among the Stormtroopers," Talon explained. "Since the majority of them are on the *Supremacy*, they're going there. Orders are to shoot to disable, and not target any of the *Supremacy*'s main systems. They're planning to seize that thing."

"Talon! Our fleet is only just holding steady! If we start holding back now, we'll be dead!" Rose exclaimed.

"The Dark Lady signed off on it. That's good enough for me," Talon said. "It's our job to make this happen."

"I'm sorry, Talon. But I can't hold my fire on a hope, they're going to have to work fast," Rose said.

"I'm told Amorosa said the same thing to them," Talon shrugged. "Do what you have to do, but if Finn and Jannah die, it's your ass."

"Noted. Tico out."

The holo vanished, Rose pinching the bridge of her nose as she leaned over the console. "Dammit, Finn. You better know what you're doing."

"Orders, ma'am?" the pilot asked.

"Target the *Supremacy*'s weapon systems," Rose said. "Ready the railgun and fire when ready."

As the shuttle landed in the hanger, cloaked by a fake landing code, Finn took a deep breath. This was it. He was here to rescue his brothers and sisters. And he had no idea how he was going to do it.

“How do we break the brainwashing of thousands of soldiers?” Jannah sighed as she turned her lightsaber over in her hand. “Was it really just the Force that made us unique?”

His hands gripped the controls of the shuttle. He had been asking himself that very question the moment he came up with this plan. Hell, it wasn't even a plan. It was an idea. A hope that these soldiers could make the same choice that he made. Turn away from the people who made them into cannon fodder. Act on that same gut instinct that this was all wrong. But what if they didn't have that instinct? “...I don't believe that's true,” he said out loud, turning to Jannah. “I think they all know that everything about this is wrong. The moment we were given serial numbers for names, we all knew this was wrong. They just need to know there's another way.”

“Phasma will kill them if they try to escape,” Jannah said.

Finn's brow furrowed. That was it, wasn't it? “Not if we kill her first,” he said as he reached over and deactivated the scrambler. “When we attacked Starkiller Base, it was Phasma who disabled the shields.”

Jannah's brow furrowed. “Why did she do that?”

“Because I put a gun to her head,” Finn said with a smirk. “We were all trained to fight and die for the glory of the masters. But the moment she was in danger, her loyalty to the First Order bent. And I think it's time everyone knew that.”

Upon hearing that, Jannah matched Finn's smirk with one of her own. “Alright then. Time to expose the truth, then.”

Finn nodded, rising from the pilot seat and making his way to the docking ramp, Jannah on his heels. With the scrambler off, it wouldn't long before they realized this ship did not belong in the hangar. They'd likely be swarmed in a matter of moments and had to prepare their case fairly quickly.

He activated the airlock door, the hiss of the compression filling his ears. “Ready?” he asked.

“As I'll ever be,” Jannah said.

The rocky cliff outside Theed Palace was as treacherous as it was beautiful. A view that showcased how vast the forests of Naboo truly were, and why Theed had been built at the top of a mountain. Unfortunately it also made traversing these cliffs hazardous, as Aliana slowly stepped backward along the ridge, parrying strikes from Kylo Ren as the Jedi advanced on her. Something within her died to admit it, but a jet pack would have been handy right about now.

The ball of her foot touched the stone behind her, and the stone gave way. Her heart nearly stopped, her mind frantically moving to course correct and keep from plummeting into the ocean below. Her free arm gripped the wall beside her, shunting Ren's assailing blade with a crackle before shifting her momentum to vault backwards. Not too much. Just enough to clear the gap left by the crumbling stone now sliding violently down the cliff face.

Ren simply stepped over the gap, flourishing his blade before resuming his assault.

Despite their precarious position, Aliana was taking note of just how much Ren's powers were failing him. Despite being able to crack stone with the Force, anything that wasn't a lightsaber strike seemed to be restrained. Held back. It had taken a while, but she soon realized why. Ren was stealing his power, and stealing it from someone who would never hurt Aliana again. This dyad was a curse for the both of them.

Aliana brought her lightsaber up, deflecting another strike with a screech of plasma and then ducking as a third strike dug into the cliff wall. She leapt back off the cliff and reached out with the Force to seize an overhang on the palace gardens. She yanked herself toward it, landing safely among the vines and flowers.

The respite was brief, Ren lunging after her, but it mattered little. The battle was still on her terms. She commanded the field. She directed where they clashed.

And thus, Kylo Ren assailed her again, his strikes confident, yet cautious. His swordwork one of speed and defense over outright domination. With every flourish and riposte of their fiery blades, he did not seek to shatter, but to weather. Whittle away at Aliana's defenses rather than batter them down outright. Supply his swordplay with the force. A tossed stone here, a tricky vine moved there. This is how his power would see him through. Not through split second obliteration, but patience and attrition.

If only there wasn't this nagging voice filling his thoughts. Slowing his strikes and counters, if only so slightly.

Phasma stepped out of the crowd, a Knight of Ren at her side. They were surrounded on all sides by Stormtroopers, blasters at the ready. To think that the traitors had come to her so eagerly.

"Disobedient," she said as she glared at Finn. "Disrespectful. Traitor!"

Most insufferably, the turncoat met her advance, her baneful condemnations, with an almost uncaring frown. "The one and only," he said proudly, a beat before looking over his shoulder, towards the woman at his side. "Well, actually, I'm not the only. That's the thing, isn't it? A lot more people seem to be coming around to my way of thinking, aren't they?"

"Children and other weaklings," Phasma countered sharply. "Those who do not know true loyalty."

Finn shook his head. "Not them. *You*," he said, taking a step forward. "You call for order, you beat us down, but when your shiny neck was threatened you squealed like a whoop hog!"

There was a rustle of plasteel as a few of the Stormtroopers looked at each other in confusion.

"The evidence blew up with the base but you and I know the truth," Finn continued, putting his fingers to his temple. "When I put a lightsaber to your head, *you* shut down Starkiller's shields!"

Phasma's shoulders tensed slightly, the memory of that shameful day hitting her like a freight cruiser. This lowly, traitorous scum managing to twist her arm. Being thrown into a trash compactor at the end of it all. Knowing that her compliance brought the end to Starkiller base. But that was a truth that would die with the two of them. No one else in the First Order would ever believe these

outrageous claims. Much less the troopers at her back. What she didn't notice was Ap'lek slowly turning to look at her with a scrutinizing eye.

"Now what would your troops do if they found out?" Finn asked, tilting a head as he glanced at the Knight who seemed to be interested in this tale. "Or your masters?"

"Who would believe a story like that?" Phasma said almost challengingly.

Jannah glanced behind her at the troopers, who were unbalanced. They were looked at each other, some looking at Phasma, and their weapons were lowering. Phasma seemed to notice too, as she pulled her pistol off her hip and fired at one of them, but the bolt froze halfway to its target, and her hand locked in place as she aimed for a second. Her head snapped to her left to see Ap'lek with his hand extended.

"Now now, Captain," he said with a contemptuous sneer. "We wouldn't want to make things worse for ourselves, would we?"

She balked from beneath her helm. "You're not actually going to believe this drek, are you? This scrap-stirring!?"

"That remains to be seen," he said, flicking his fingers and sending the bolt veering off course and into the side of a TIE fighter. "Settle this, Captain. And then we will talk. What does the Dark Lady call it? Trial by combat?"

She could not believe this. This unbearably smug knight dared to suggest they play by the Sith's rules? By the enemy's rules? All in the name of proving her loyalty when there were two traitors not a blade's reach away from them?

She looked around the organized mass of trooper, not looking quite so organized now. The uncertainty. The conflict. It showed through their armor. Through the helmets that shielded their faces from sight. Their confidence was shaken. Their perspective called into question. Years of training and conditioning to make these wastes of slag into the perfect soldiers threatened to be undone by a few cheap words? What a galaxy to live in.

Phasma bit back a curse so hard, she nearly cracked her molars. Ap'lek was right. She needed to set an example. If that meant stomping this traitor's face into the durasteel floor beneath her, then so be it.

"...Very well," she said before dropping the blaster with a clack and kicking it away. "Give us some space, men. You are about to see the strength and unwavering conviction of the First Order at work."

Ap'lek signaled for the Troopers to back away, as he turned on his heel and strutted to the edge of the ring. In truth, he'd been having reservations for quite some time. Since Snoke's death, the First Order had been dying of a terminal illness. The leadership was completely disheveled, the new Supreme Leader was a talentless runt who could barely slay a girl with no lightsaber training let alone the Dark Lady of the Sith, and he'd been forced to sit and watch as his brothers and sisters were slaughtered. They would not win this Kaggath, and the Troopers being so easily shaken was the final nail in the coffin. They were conditioned from birth to serve. They possessed little will of their own. All of it had been stamped out of them. If Phasma lost this fight, the troopers would turn their service to the Sith, and the Kaggath would be lost.

Phasma stepped forward and pulled something else off her belt. What looked like the hilt of a fencer's foil, the kind they'd seen Phasma training with many times as they grew up. But it was without a blade, instead possessing a hollow...

Emitter.

Finn's eyes went wide as Phasma ignited a pale blue lightsaber. That... he was not expecting that.

"You sure you're gonna be okay?" Jannah asked at his side, not looking eager to back away from this.

"...Yeah," he nodded, squaring his shoulders and cracking his neck. "This has been a long time coming, anyway. I don't think I could back down from this even if I wanted to."

An eon of silent deliberation passed by in a second, and then Jannah nodded, taking a step forward. "I know how you feel."

Both of them ignited their lightsabers.

Rey had never experienced what it was like to be in a coma before. She'd heard the rumors, heard the testimonials from people who had been in comas, but this was unlike anything she'd imagined. She wondered if it was a real coma, as she stepped onto something solid, and at the same time immaterial. She could see nothing, there was no light here. She could feel glass beneath her feet, but the soft clink of her heels hitting it were the only thing that told her it was in fact glass.

All around her she could hear ominous whispering. She couldn't hear what it was saying, and only caught scattered words. *Bind. Unity. Will*. The Force, probably.

She could feel something on her wrists. Something that rattled. Looking down, she saw they were chains. Chains that occasionally pulled tight, as if trying to lead her somewhere. She pulled back, almost instinctively. Whatever the person at the other end wanted, she wasn't interested in giving it to them.

"Where am I?" she said aloud.

Through the flittering whispers, she heard something a bit clearer.

No where. No when. Such limitations do not exist beyond crude matter.

Rey frowned. Wonderful. When this voice didn't feel like being incomprehensible, it felt like being cryptic. The chains tugged insistently on her wrists again. It was obnoxious, and at the same time familiar. "Alright. Where exactly are you trying to take me?"

No where. Already there. Embrace it.

Already there? Embrace it? A cold shiver ran down Rey's spine as the realization descended upon her. All at once, she could see flashes of something. A garden. Surrounded by brown stone. Aliana clashing lightsabers with her. Why was she attacking-

Oh.

"No. I don't think I will," Rey said matter of factly.

At those words, the whispering seemed to stop. There was a blissful silence for a moment, before she heard footsteps behind her. She turned around and saw...

Herself.

Herself but different. She was in her old Jakku robes, but cleaner. Tidier. Her hair was tied back in a single braid. Her eyes weren't burning yellow. She looked every bit like the quintessential Jedi Leia had always wanted her to be. She hated it.

"You've wandered from yourself, Rey," this white garbed mirror of her said. "It's time to come back."

"Wandered from myself?" Rey asked with an incredulous snort. "And I take it that's who you are supposed to be? I don't know who you think I am, but it's certainly not you."

"Aren't I?"

"I can see what you're supposed to be. My light. The 'goodness' in me," Rey said dismissively. "But why you're here betrays that. I can tell. You want me to accept... *these* ." She rattled the chains on her wrists.

"If that is to be true, then why are they pulling you away from me?" the other Rey asked.

Almost as if on cue, Rey felt the chains yank sharply, taking her a step backwards. Distancing herself from this other way. Her frown deepened. "You think I don't know the Force to be capable of misdirection?"

"The Force has no need for chains," the other Rey said. "It's energy surrounds us and binds us. All things are connected through the Force. Only the Sith, in their limited, selfish understanding of the Force, believe in such things as chains."

Rey scoffed, almost laughing. "You're telling me these shackles are actually from my wife?" she said with a sneer.

"There are no chains," the other Rey countered, shaking her hand. "Only those who believe in such confines in the Force can see them. You only see chains because you chose to believe they are there."

"That's what this dyad is. Chains. The Force trying to control me, trying to dictate my life in some nebulous quest for balance. I can't see it any other way," Rey said firmly. "There is no other way to see it. Right now I can see him trying to kill my wife. I will never accept that."

The other Rey had the gall, the kriffing nerve, to smile softly at her. "And yet your strength is helping him."

Rey blinked at that, her heart sinking. She looked down at herself. This... this wasn't her body being chained like this. How could it be? No, this was her spirit being chained. Being tugged on. Being... sapped for strength. No... no, this couldn't be. She wouldn't let her strength be used to hurt Alie. She pulled back on the chains, pulling them tight. Reversing the polarity, as she had a year ago on Starkiller Base. Sapping strength from *him* .

"Not anymore," she said, glaring at her doppelganger.

For her efforts, the other Rey simply looked at her, disappointed. “You don’t actually want to do this.”

“Do what? Let your machinations separate me from the love of my life?” Rey demanded, taking the chains in her hands and pulling even harder on them. “Then yes. You’re right! I don’t want to do it!”

“You have the potential to become something so much greater than yourself, if you would just embrace the Force. It doesn’t want to hurt you.”

“Doesn’t want to hurt me?! It shackled me to that rodent! Do you know what he’s done? Not just to the galaxy, but to me?! To *you* ?!” Rey demanded.

The other Rey was quiet at that, and the whispers returned. Rey could barely hear them through the blood now pounding in her ears, much less hear what they were saying. Even so, something told her it wasn’t *her* those whispers were directed towards.

“...Who we are through the force means so much more than what the material world can offer,” the other Rey said finally. “What we’ve done matters so little compared to what we can still do. And you can still find balance in the Force.”

“Look around,” Rey said with a shrug. “The Force means more than the material world? There are people dying out there. They’re suffering out there. And you want me to turn a blind eye to it because it doesn’t matter? Those people *are* the Force! Without them the Force would die! How can you not see that?!”

Another bout of silence, and more hushed whispering. “...You are right. The Force exists in all living things. From the largest Krayt Dragon to the most miniscule of microbes. Live in the universe extends beyond that of the beings you call sentient. Balance can exist even when life around it cannot comprehend it.”

Rey sighed, looking at her double in disappointment. “Well I like that material world. I like those people. I love my wife. And given the choice, I would rather spend the rest of my mortal days with her than surrender it for balance,” she said. “You might not have experienced it, you might not know what it is, but her love is more precious to me than all the power in the galaxy. I would gladly cut myself off from the Force if it meant getting to spend the rest of my life with her.”

For the first time since she showed up, the other Rey actually looked surprised. Perhaps because, deep down, she knew this other version of herself was telling the truth. She could tell beyond a shadow of a doubt that Rey believed she could be happy without the Force. Complete even.

The whispers became sharper. *Unity, Bind, and Will* now assaulting her ears like needles.

“Why are you trying to convince me to give that up?” Rey asked. “Why are you-” She stopped as she noticed something. Something on the other Rey’s hand. A patch of skin that was graying ever so slightly. Necrotizing flesh. She died... at least for a short while. She reached out with her senses and could feel that her life force was stitched back together by... something else. The same way Alie’s had been by Luke, but there was something far more sinister about what was keeping her together.

“...It’s a choice you never had.”

That grayed hand clenched at a fist. A slight furrow forming between the other Rey's brow.

"You didn't have Alie," Rey continued. "You were roped into this whole thing without her by your side."

"I had others," the other Rey said stiffly. "And I had the Force. That's all I needed."

Rey took a step toward her and laid a hand on her midsection, where she could feel a shatterpoint in her body. As she touched it, she was assaulted by visions. Lightning, pushing back, death, the feeling of something being channeled into her to revive her. The last and final great cruelty of the Force, ensuring that even with the rat's death, this Rey wouldn't be free of him.

"...I'm sorry," she said softly. "You didn't deserve that."

The other Rey jerked back, eyes wide with shock. Her hands trembled at her sides, her lips on the verge of quivering.

The needling whispers picked up again. This time, the other Rey winced.

"...S-Sorry for what?" she asked, forcing a tremulous smile on her face. "I'm alright. Truly."

"No you're not," Rey said softly. She could see her conviction wavering. Her carefully constructed composure cracking. Rey had spent so long with Aliana, who wore masks all the time, that she could tell when someone was hiding something. Especially if that someone was herself. "What was done to you was wrong. All of it."

"It was necessary!" the other Rey said, raising her voice for the first time since she got there. She went stiff for a moment, her wide eyes suddenly clamping shut as she lowered her head. "It... It was necessary," she repeated, her voice far more strained. "If I didn't I... I..."

Rey took another step forward and laid a hand on the other Rey's shoulder. "It wasn't your fault," she said. "None of it was your fault. You didn't ask for any of this."

"But... I couldn't just look the other way!" the other Rey protested weakly, not shrugging off her mirror's hand when she could have. "I couldn't just be selfish and let evil win!"

"And the Force should not have repaid your selflessness with this," Rey said, laying her other hand on the other Rey's cheek. "You've done your part. You deserve to be able to take time for yourself. I'm sure the galaxy will get along just fine long enough for you to rest. Find something that matters to you."

The other Rey's eyes started to glass, her trembling getting worse as she met her dark double's gaze to find nothing but warmth and understanding in them. "I... T-Thank you. That's-"

A sudden crack cut her off, both Rey's looking down to witness the glass they both stood on begin to fracture. The whispers suddenly turned into violent hissing, the Force making its dismay known.

"No! Not yet!" the other Rey pleaded as she watched the cracks get bigger. Predominantly where she stood. "Just... Give me a moment more! I need to keep talking to her!"

Rey reached her hand out, seizing the very platform they stood upon and pressing the cracks together. The Force rattled and struggled, but her will was stronger. "You're more than just the

Force, Rey. You're more than just some cosmic destiny. And you deserve to truly have something to call your own. All you have to do is go out and find it. Or *her*."

The other Rey blinked, the meaning of those words ringing clear the moment they fell on her ears. Suddenly, the hissing disapproval of the Force didn't seem to even register. "But... There's still so much to do. The Order. The Republic."

Rey only smiled. "You're twenty. There's plenty of time for all of that. It doesn't have to be right now. You just achieved so much. You should take some time to yourself. You can't take care of the galaxy if you don't first take care of yourself. Be a little selfish. It's good for you."

The Force writhed and strained against this, slamming against that which allowed these two to even speak to one another. Alas, Rey's grip held firm. Denying the floor beneath them from cracking. The other Rey looked conflicted, her arms folded in a way to suggest she was actually hugging herself. Suddenly, her stature as a poster girl for the Jedi seemed to have vanished. She looked a great deal smaller. Rey could see the wheels in her light side reflection turn. "...Do you think I'll ever stop... feeling him?"

"I don't know," Rey said softly. "I'm hoping she can cut me free of these chains, so that *I* will stop feeling him. But I do know that you most certainly will not if you don't move beyond it. Leave him behind. Stop allowing him to occupy your mind. You can't break your own chains if you don't pull on them first."

"Do you think... I will ever find peace?"

"You never find peace. You *make* peace," Rey said.

Immediately, she could see the effect those words had on her other self. Right before her, she saw something click into place in the Jedi's mind. Less a realization and more remembering a long standing truth. An instinct she must have lost sight of in the wake of everything. "I *make* peace," she echoed softly, looking down at her own hands. "...Alright. I'll do that then."

Rey smiled. "Take care, Rey..." she gestured to her.

"...Skywalker."

Rey chuckled softly. "Beniko."

"...That's very pretty."

"Thank you."

Rey let go of the glass and the Force split it in two, drawing her double away and into the darkness. As Rey watched her leave, she felt the pull of the chains grow weaker.

"What do you mean they're on the Supremacy!?" Poe balked, twisting the controls to narrowly wrench free from the merciless pursuit of homing torpedoes, sending them right into the hull of the Caedus.

"I mean they are on the Supremacy!" Rose shot back firmly. "Believe me, I am just as shocked as you are, but we have to hold off on assailing that flagship for as long as possible!"

“Son of a-” Poe swallowed the remainder of that curse, taking his frustration out on the TIE Fighter in front of him. “BB-8! Can you patch Finn in please!?”

The droid chirped and wooed in the negative, something about on board jammers blocking out any unauthorized channels within the Supremacy.

“Dammit!” Poe exclaimed, making the Fury dive and switching his focus to the Caedus, unloading into the shields with the entire loaded stock of torpedoes. He was aided by a shot from the Dromund Kaas’ railgun, which hit the shields with such force that the Dreadnought was pushed sideways. “Whoa, that thing really packs a punch.”

“That it does,” Rose confirmed over the comm. “If we manage to take out these two cruisers quickly enough, we might be able to encircle the Supremacy and pressure it into a surrender.”

“And what about Finn and Jannah!?” Poe asked.

“Their fates are in their hands,” Rose said plainly. “Best we can do is give them time and take out the rest of this fleet. If push comes to shove... we’ll figure it out.”

“What’s the update from our ground forces?”

“The fighting has gone to Theed’s streets,” Rose explained. “Talon’s forces are up against Stormtroopers and droids commanded by a Knight. Ushar I think. Nasty little shutta. Likes to leave sadistic messages on the comms.”

“And Alie?”

“Her comms went quiet shortly after Kylo’s shuttle landed. She hasn’t reported in yet, which isn’t the best sign.”

Poe grit his teeth, hull of the Fury just shy of grazing the Caedus’ hull with a whole platoon of fighters on his tail. To his pleasure, they were dense enough to fire on their own cruiser in some vain attempt to try and land a hit on him. It did little to soothe over his nerves.

He was hoping this battle would be decisive. Stomp Kylo Ren. Stomp the First Order’s fleet. Save the galaxy. Alas, everyone seemed to want to go their own way. He could barely focus on the rain of fire and turbolasers happening just outside his viewport. The unknown fates of his friends played out grimly behind his eyes.

Finn. Damn that man and his big bleeding heart. Of course he would pull something like this. Of course he wanted to believe the best in the other Stormtroopers. They had spent long nights talking about it, certainly. So why not tell him about this sudden last minute plan before it was already in motion? He wrenched the Fury through the tailfins of the Caedus and fired the rear torpedoes into it’s exhaust port, creating a chain reaction as the entire starboard engine started exploding.

“One of the Caedus’ engines is down,” he announced, pulling around and firing the Fury’s blaster cannons at the oncoming TIE fighters. “All ships, target their weapons and fire. If it’s dead in the water, it’s as good as destroyed.”

“Excellent show of flying, Commander Dameron!” 2V appraised.

“Thanks, 2V,” Poe said, veering the Fury hard to starboard.

“Is there anything I may assist you with?” 2V asked.

“Yeah. Remind me later to sit my boyfriend down for a long talk about clear and open communication between partners in regards to warfare,” Poe said with a deep frown.

“A reminder has been set,” 2V said happily.

Leia watched as the readout screen marked the Caedus as having been made immobile. A quarter of the First Order fleet had been destroyed or disabled, and a lot of the larger ships were being left in surprisingly salvageable states. An order from Aliana perhaps? To salvage the ships for her promised campaigns into the Outer Rim?

“That frigate Master Beniko designed packs a punch,” Tahraya remarked as she paced around the terminal.

“She knows her way around tech,” Leia confirmed. “It will be enough to put the First Order’s fleet out of commission.”

“I have no doubt that the Sith Fleet will win the day, General,” Tahraya said with a smile. “If anything I’m more concerned with the cleanup afterwards.”

“The Resistance won’t leave you with a ruined city, I promise you that,” Leia said. “Those two clean up their messes.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” Tahraya said. “I was initially nervous about this deal I struck, but already most progress has been made against the First Order than the Republic did with years and a full fleet.”

“The Republic’s unwillingness to move always frustrated me,” Leia sighed.

“What about now?” Tahraya asked. “With Villecham gone, has anything changed?”

“Borsk Fey’lya was just elected Chancellor and his first act was to place a three billion credit bounty on Aliana’s head,” Leia explained. “He’s also declared the Sith to be a greater enemy than the First Order and has publicly stated an attempt to ally with the First Order should they win this fight.”

“That’s... not an improvement,” Tahraya sighed.

“No. Aliana’s assassination of the Chancellor has only made things worse,” Leia sighed. “She’s a passionate leader, but impulsive.”

“I wouldn’t say she’s impulsive, but she’s clearly cynical,” Tahraya countered. “I think she considered this inevitable and doesn’t believe doing things differently will change anything.”

“She does tend to approach matters with her mind already made up,” Leia said in concession. “Not the easiest kind of person to work with.”

“Perhaps not, but I do look forward to working with her in the future,” Tahraya said warmly.

“Though, I cannot say the same for all of my advisors or any other politicians gearing for election. They may try to campaign against my recent decisions.”

“In that case, this battle may be the deciding factor,” Leia remarked. “The aftermath of this fight is going to be something we all live with, and that’s why Aliana’s cynicism concerns me. If she loses, she’s made life a lot harder for *everyone* .”

Phasma’s lightsaber connected with both Finn’s and Jannah’s with a screech, and shunted them aside with a twist of her wrist. With an equally quick twist back, she dragged the blade over Finn’s off hand, leaving a scorching burn.

Phasma had proven to be skilled with a lightsaber, and skilled in the form specifically made for *fighting* those with lightsabers, and she smirked inside her helmet at how unprepared they were for this. The previous Supreme Leader, Snoke, had trained her like this in case one of the Knights got delusions of grandeur and needed to be put down. The training had been done entirely in secret, lest the Knights catch wind that there was an enforcer standing beside them and train to counter accordingly. It was an idea he had gotten from his own predecessor, who trained a droid to kill Jedi during the Clone Wars. It was that training that put both Finn and Jannah on the back foot, the former nursing a fresh burn that sent pain arcing up his entire arm.

“Pitiful,” Phasma spat, flourishing her blade at the two. “This is what your little movement has provided? A pair of would-be Jedi who cannot press a two on one advantage? You threw away your loyalty, spat on our cause, for this?”

“What cause?” Finn spat, parrying another strike one-handed and countering with an upward slash that Phasma stepped back to avoid. “You’re a thug that rampages across the galaxy killing innocent people for nothing!”

“The weak exist to be ruled by the strong,” Phasma said flippantly, spinning her wrist to parry a streak of yellow from Jannah’s blade. “It was among the first things you were taught. And those who refuse to learn will be dealt with.”

“Like how you are ruled by a half-trained Jedi who can barely hold a lightsaber?” Jannah spat, striking again and leaving Phasma’s left side open.

Finn took it, moving faster than Phasma was expecting, giving his injured hand, and carving into her chromium plating. The grunt of pain brought a smile to his face, telling him his blade struck true.

Phasma reeled back, free hand gripping the red hot mark that was seared into her side. “Insolent little turncoats!”

Around them, the Stormtroopers were becoming increasingly restless. As Phasma continued to repeat her ‘strong should rule’ rhetoric, her own strength and leadership was being routinely undermined by the fact that she was losing. Even the Knight was growing tense as he watched Phasma lose her upper hand.

Phasma turned and slashed at Jannah, who parried and immediately moved to counter. But when Phasma turned her wrist to catch it, Jannah deactivated her lightsaber. The now bladeless hilt passed by Phasma’s hand, and then reactivated to bring the blade screeching into her chest. Agony seized Phasma’s entire world, sapping the strength from her body and the breath from her lungs in one blink. Time itself seemed to slow as she came to realize what had just happened. Through the filter of her helmet, she could take in Jannah’s baneful expression long enough to hear the hum of another lightsaber cut the air behind her.

After that, she knew nothing. After that, she was nothing.

Finn breathing did not come as heavy as he thought it would, given how much force he instinctively put in that one swing. He watched as Phasma's head, still in its helmet, rolled along the polished, durasteel floor, the rest of her crumpling down shortly after. It took a moment to hit him. Captain Phasma, a person, a silhouette that once struck a hard learned fear in him, now laid dead at his feet. Jannah looked around at the troopers, and all of them had lowered their blasters. A few seemed unable to believe that Phasma was actually dead. One took off their helmet, revealing the face of a young woman who started in shock at Phasma's corpse.

"I didn't think it was possible," another said, removing his helmet as well.

"Well it is possible," Finn said, pointing his lightsaber at Phasma's remains. "This, right here? This is proof that she was wrong. That the First Order is wrong. They tried to make us not see that. To think that their way was the only way and that anything else would lead to our destruction. They tried so damn hard to make us think we had no choice. To take that choice away from us. Make us think we only existed to serve them. And guess what? They were wrong."

More troopers took off their helmets, wanting to look upon Phasma's remains with their own eyes. Others drew closer, taking a few shots with their blasters at her head, as if wanting to be absolutely sure she wasn't getting back up. As they all came to grips with what had just happened and what this meant, they turned toward Finn and Jannah and raised their hands in a salute. Finn and Jannah could only watch in awe for a moment, their hearts hammering in their chest as the truth dawned upon them. They did it. They reached out to their fellow troopers, and they listened. They made them see that there was another way.

Jannah turned to look at Finn. "I think they're waiting for our word."

Finn took in a deep breath, steeling himself once more before calling out to all of them, to the entire damn hangar. "Brothers! Sisters! The First Order did us an injustice! They took our freedom from us! Our families! Our lives! It's time we take it all back!"

There was a roaring cheer from the troopers in the hangar, a few raised their blasters.

"We move through the ship and take the Supremacy! Without it the First Order falls!"

There was another roaring cheer.

Finn looked at Jannah and smiled. "We need to recall the ships, and our ground forces."

"All of that is controlled from the throne room," Jannah explained. "There's a fleetwide broadcast on the Supreme Leader's channel. But they won't listen so long as the Supreme Leader is still alive. The throne is wired to his comm."

"Then we take the ship, and hope Alie kills the bastard," Finn agreed. "Once we're there, we can order a full ceasefire."

Jannah nodded in agreement, her gaze turning to the one body around them that wasn't outwardly jubilant. Ap'lek. "And what about you? Are you not going to stop us?"

"...No, I don't think I will," Ap'lek said with an almost comically casual shrug. "All this beheading and talk of upending command has me itching to cut down a certain smug General. Seeing as

everyone else has been taken.”

Finn and Jannah looked at each other, and then shrugged. Everyone had their own goals, after all.

“Alright,” he said. “Welcome aboard...” he gestured toward him expectantly.

Ap’lek was quiet for a moment before finally answering “...Jaden. Jaden Korr.”

“...Jaden Korr,” Jannah said, as though sampling the name. “Alright then. Welcome aboard, Jaden.”

“Thank you,” Jaden nodded. “Here’s hoping I do not immediately regret this decision.”

Aliana’s lightsaber screeched as she locked it with Ren’s. The duel had progressed deep into the gardens and through the upper levels, taking them inside a large spiral greenhouse. Though Aliana took great care not to damage the plants, Ren was not so restrained. She twisted her hand and broke the lock, slashing upward. She was parried, and then an explosion rocked the greenhouse and split the ground beneath them. They both stepped back as the fissure separated them and made the greenhouse drift apart, barely holding on by its base supports and creating a large gap between them.

Aliana deactivated her lightsaber and grabbed onto a tree to keep from falling into the twenty storey chasm below.

“Well, good to see that the battle is still in full swing,” Aliana said through clenched teeth, turning her gaze to the other end of the chasm where Kylo Ren stood. Her lightsaber reignited in her free hand, training it on the Jedi she fully expected to try and vault across the gap after her.

Instead, she saw him extend an open hand and the entire tree she was upon began to move. She bit back a curse before kicking off of the bark of the tree with her durasteel foot. The plant was torn from its roots as Ren yanked it towards him, cleaving it in twain where she had been not a heartbeat ago. She stood up on the other edge of the newly made chasm, scowling at him while dusting herself off. “I hope you know your newfound tact is more annoying than it is impressive.”

“I’m not trying to impress you, Sith!” Ren snarled, this time seizing her with the Force. But instead of ripping her off her feet, several ports opened on Aliana’s leg and claws shot out, snatching the jagged stone under her feet and rooting her in place. Instead of being yanked, she simply lurched.

“...Okay, that’s new,” she said in surprise. “When did Rey have time for-?”

A spinning wheel of crimson plasma flew towards her faster than any blaster fire, Aliana having less than a thought to swat it away with a backhanded swing. A gloved hand caught the wayward weapon from falling into the chasm below, Kylo Ren already in the air and flying right towards her. He did not meet his mark, the power flying free from Aliana’s hand striking him square in the chest. He hit the far cliff face with an ugly sounding crack, looking almost too stunned to grab the edge and hold tight.

Had Aliana not already made a promise to Leia, she might have very well pressed the advantage, having him fall helplessly into the abyss beneath them. As it was, she watched him climb back up to stable ground. She took a step back, observing him as he struggled to get to his feet. Throughout the entire duel, Kylo Ren had been steadily growing weaker and weaker. His strength being sapped

from him. During their scrap in the gardens, Aliana had actually felt a tremor in the Force, and since then that deterioration had only accelerated.

“She’s resisting you,” she said as he stood up.

Kylo Ren turned to leer at her, hair sticking to his sweaty face. “...What?”

“Rey. She’s resisting you,” Aliana said, vindication steeped in her voice. “You’re relying on the strength of your little dyad to fight me, but she won’t let you. Throughout this entire little duel, you had to yank on as much power as you could get from her just to get this far. You’ve been fighting me and her this whole time and losing.”

Kylo Ren growled and reactivated his lightsaber. “I... don’t need... that weak Jedi’s power...”

He struck, but if he had been growing weaker before he was certainly at the deepest point now. Aliana effortlessly parried him, twisted her lightsaber to hold it backhand as she seized his wrist, and brought both down to spin her lightsaber into his midsection. He didn’t scream. He couldn’t. The wind had rushed out of his lungs as a burning pain spread through his stomach. Aliana pushed him to his knees and deactivated her lightsaber. It was over.

Almost.

Ren seemed to realize this as well, and simply knelt there trying to process the burning pain in his stomach. “...How?”

Aliana arched a brow. “How what?”

“All... these years... I’ve trained... risen to the throne... it still wasn’t enough...” he coughed, doubling over as he clutched his cauterized wound. “What does it take... to beat you? How can you be... so powerful?”

The question hung in the air for a moment, Aliana inwardly debating whether she should give him the satisfaction of an answer. That is, if such an answer would give him any satisfaction.

“...I have something worth fighting for. It’s really that simple,” Aliana said. “Allies I can trust to have my back. Loved ones I would move mountains for, and who would do the same for me. People who might even look up to me. Imagine that.” She knelt down to be closer to his level, taking in the incredulity and despair in his face. “...But you had all of that, once upon a time. And you gave it up for power. Funny.”

“That... that can’t... impossible...” Kylo Ren coughed.

“Your mother leads the charge against you. Your uncle killed himself so I would come back to end your life. The Force has granted you an endless feedback loop of power, but with someone who would gladly see you dead,” Aliana said. “There is no depths of the Dark Side you could plunge that could stand up to any of that. That Sith you idolize was left with nothing, destroyed everything for the Dark Side. Where is he now?”

Aliana stood up to full height and extended a hand toward his skull.

“There’s just one last loose end to cut,” she said as she reached into his mind.

Aliana felt herself falling through a nearly endless void as she dove into the very depths of Kylo Ren's soul. Past his mind, past his subconscious, deep down into the primordial essence of the Force found in everyone. She could hear the Force chanting ominously around her, angry at her intrusion. But she dove further still. After all, she was Sith. The Force served her, not the other way around. Her feet eventually found purchase on what felt like glass, and what little light there was in this place showed that glass was scorched. It crumbled and crackled in places, bubbles hardened into place amidst the damage Ren had done to himself. In the very center, she could see him. Or rather, a shadowy facsimile of him, arms bound in chains that extended off into the black and empty void.

Drawing closer, she could make out new details all about this shade of Ren. It appeared to be composed entirely of smoke and tar. The kind of thing you would expect to see inside an industrial waste barrel. Such an apt visualization of what had become of this man. The chains bound around the shade's arms suddenly drew taut, as if something was yanking on them. The shade writhed, pulling back as hard as he could. All the while, the whispers of the Force chattered incessantly overhead.

Bind. Unity. Destiny.

This was it, Aliana thought. This was the dyad. Perfectly represented before her. A set of chains cast by the Force binding two people together. Shackles. Imprisonment. Only the promise of power to coerce them to give in. And only one had accepted that promise. As she laid her hand on the chain, she felt the Force writhe around her. Angrily lashing out at her. She shrouded herself in the Dark Side, ignoring its attacks. She could feel along the chain, and could sense Rey on the other end pulling on them. Even in a coma, her wife was still resisting.

Pride welled in Aliana's chest, which she channeled right back into her hand. Her will sent ripples through the chain, much to the chagrin of the Force itself. Soon enough, she felt Rey's presence through the chains halt its struggle. The struggle between these two was put on hold when she felt a familiar presence through it. Aliana felt her wife's essence brush against her. Curiously. As though confirming it was really her.

"Hello, sweetheart," she whispered with a smile. "Probably the last place you expected to hear from me, I know. Well, you may be happy to hear that I'm finally doing it. I'm freeing you from this stupid kriffing dyad. Just hold still for me."

She couldn't hear words, but she felt a rush and shee, unbridled joy and the tension on the chains slackened. Slackened enough in fact that Aliana could actually take it in her hands. They were... surprisingly light. Her fingers ran down the links, pulling the slackened chain up onto the platform, until she found one. It was corroded and bent. Strained by Rey's continued resistance. She took that link in her hands, and with a gentle tug, it snapped and clattered to the floor.

The Force hissed in outrage. It stammered unintelligibly as the corrosion spread from the severed links, promptly turning the rest of the chain into dust. The shade of Ren went limp, collapsing on the ground now that it was bereft of the dyad that bound it to Rey. The shade bubbled and sizzled as it laid on the ground, seemingly getting smaller as the power it stole from the Dyad was now gone. Aliana was almost surprised. Severing this bond imposed by the Force itself, driving the woman she loved into new depths of misery, was such a quiet, almost mundane thing. Even on this very platform, the rumblings of the Force only emphasized just how silent it was here. Silent. Dark. Empty.

She would linger here no longer.

As Aliana withdrew from Kylo Ren's mind, she could see that he had visibly grown weaker.

"What... have you done..." he gasped.

Aliana circled around to stand behind him. "I've unshackled her from you," she said, bracing a hand under his chin and laying the other on the top of his head.

"You... can't..."

"I can, and I did," she said, before yanking her bottom hand to the right.

There was a crunch, a gasp, and then he fell limp and unbreathing to the floor.

I Won't Deny You Your Grief

Aliana laid the body of Kylo Ren onto the passenger bench in the back of the shuttle. She sat on the opposite side and just... stared at him. She had thought killing him would bring her a rush of catharsis. Of satisfaction. Instead, she felt as if there had been this crushing weight holding her down for so long that she'd forgotten it was there lift from her shoulders. She felt light. Almost fluttery. It was a strange sensation. This Jedi and his master had caused her so much pain. Years of her life wasted hiding in fear, an education stunted by the loss of her mother, and a bitter, hateful view of the systems that allowed this pain to occur.

"Did you ever regret it?" she wondered aloud. Probably not. Kylo Ren was completely unrepentant. He didn't regret murdering his own father, let alone her mother. Perhaps as his death was nearing he considered that he had brought this on himself. How he'd empowered and motivated his own killer. But any sincere regret? Unlikely.

She quietly wondered where things had gone wrong. He must have been a good kid at some point, his mother wouldn't have been so invested in his redemption otherwise. Was it the Jedi? Was it a feeling of destiny? Was he simply enticed by the power of the Force to seek out more of it? Did Palpatine's empire just appeal to his adolescent sensibilities? She would likely never know. He was dead, and therefore couldn't answer.

She stood up and approached him, grabbing his head and twisting it out of the unnatural angle it had been in when she broke his neck. "Might as well look presentable for your mother for once in your life," she said before turning to the cockpit. It was time to go.

An explosion rocked the *Dromund Kaas* as a hailstorm of torpedoes struck their broadside. Rose was thrown out of her chair from the sheer force and a few panels exploded.

"Report!" she yelled.

"Shields are holding firm, but the shock knocked loose a few of our blaster cannons," one officer said. "Two of our Capital Ships have been destroyed, but the Supremacy has stopped firing."

Rose' eyes widened slightly. Stopped firing? Could that mean... had Finn and Jannah done it? She reached for her personal commlink, tuning it to Finn's frequency. "Finn? Are you there? Finn, do you copy?"

No response, their internal jammers must have still been up.

"Admiral. The Supremacy has stopped firing. Your orders?"

"Hold on," she said, changing the frequency on her comlink. "This is Rose to Amorosa, come in!"

There was silence for a moment, and then a crackle before a tired voice said "This is Darth Amorosa."

Rose breathed a sigh of relief. "What's your status?"

"I'm loading the rat's body onto a shuttle as we speak," Aliana said. "He's dead."

Rose felt her heart leap into her throat. If they'd taken the Supremacy, that meant Phasma was dead. With both him and Kyo Ren dead, all they had to do was destroy Hux and Pryde and the head would be cut off the First Order.

"Patch me through to the fleet!" Rose demanded.

The officer hit a few panels and gave a thumbs up.

"This is Admiral Tico! All ships focus your fire on the *Krayt* ! Turn it into molten slag!" she practically yelled into the comm.

Within moments, the fleet carried out its orders. Fighters and cruisers all homed on onto the Krayt, showering it in fiery blasts from what remained of its defenses. Turbo lasers were knocked out. TIE Fighters were blown out of the sky. The shields of the Krayt flickered and buckled under the sheer stress of the fire power put upon it. It was only a matter of time before it would fall.

"Fire the railgun," Rose commanded.

A sharp jet of violet plasma tore into the side of the Krayt, and with its shields gone the dreadnought had a hole punched right through it, and the ship itself buckled at the point of impact.

Rose cheered and punched the air. "Now that's what I'm talking about! I love this ship! Rey, I could kiss you!"

"...Don't let the Dark Lady hear you say that, Admiral," one of the ensigns said with a snicker.

The Krayt's hull was warped by the force of the blast, all of their forces focusing on the punctured point. Fiery explosions blossomed from the cruiser's gaping wound, several smaller ones occurring elsewhere from the chain reaction. It tilted hard on its side, its engines shot and gravity taking the heavy slab into its clutches.

The rest of the ships in the fleet continued to fire on it, tearing through the hull until the Krayt finally exploded into shrapnel.

"Excellent work!" Rose yelled through the comm. "Ensign, charge the railgun and bring me in range of the Caedus."

"The railgun is jammed, Admiral. It won't turn," came the cry of the tactical officer.

"Then bring us to strafe!"

The Ensign nodded, turning to carry out his orders before his console chimed. "...Uh, Admiral? The Caedus is hailing us."

Rose blinked. "Really? Oh, this ought to be good. On holo." With the press of a button, the bridge's holo flickered to life and brought with it Hux's visage.

"Well, I must say you and your little flunkies have lasted longer than I was expecting," he said, squeezing out as much condescending ooze from his tone as possible. "Now, why don't we negotiate your surrender before we really make you hurt?"

"Make us hurt?" Rose smirked. "Have you noticed that the Supremacy is dead in the water, Hux? Or that I just ripped apart one of your Dreadnoughts? Your own cruiser can't move or fire. And you

want us to surrender?”

She watched him swallow back whatever emotions tried to claw their way to the surface before speaking again. “If you think that you have what it takes to truly best the full might of our forces, you are gravely mistaken. By my count, nearly a third of your forces have been lost already.”

Out of the window, Rose could see the Supremacy actually move. Checking her readings, she saw it was powering weapons and targeting the Supremacy, moving to fire along the opposite side as the *Dromund Kaas*. She tried not to let the thrill of excitement show on her face. “Which is why I will not let their deaths be in vain,” She said firmly. “Continue firing! Send the Caedus to the bottom of the ocean!”

The officers all glanced at each other, looking confused.

Rose groaned. “Okay so I’m getting a little nautical! Just put a railgun shot through his eyes dammit!”

“This... is your last chance,” Hux said, unable to mask the tremor in his voice now. “Stop this pointless flailing and we’ll show mercy.”

“The railgun is charged, Admiral,” the tactical officer announced. “And we are in position.”

“Target the Caedus’ bridge and fire,” Rose said with a vindictive smirk. “Put the blaster cannons onto the hull!”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Even through the blue filter of the holo, Rose could see Hux go even paler. Something she almost found impressive. “W-Wait! Hold on! You don’t want to do this! I can-!”

The holo fizzled and blipped off, the connection lost as the rail gun tore into the bridge as they passed, leaving nothing but molten metal behind. The blaster cannons struck the hull while the railgun charged a second time, all the while the *Supremacy* was firing all weapons into the *Caedus*. The two passed the ship by, molten metal and blaster fire catching the ship in a massive iron maiden that reduced the ship to fragmented shards of scrap metal

Rose smiled as she watched the Caedus split apart, practically atomized. She’d wanted to kill Hux for a long time, and Rey gave her the perfect weapon for it.

“Admiral, the rest of the First Order ships are putting out ceasefire signals,” the comms officer said.

“Really?” Rose smiled. “Well then... pull the fleet back.”

Aliana stepped back onto the bridge of the *Dromund Kaas*, her robes singed from hours of lightsaber combat. She was exhausted, and news that the battle had reached a standstill had initially troubled her and hastened her return to the fleet.

“What’s going on?” she asked.

“The First Order’s fleet has put out a ceasefire, and their ground forces surrendered against the wishes of Ushar,” Rose explained. “Talon captured her and it seems the Stormtroopers are destroying their own droids. On top of that, we’ve gotten a hailing request... from the Supreme Leader.”

Aliana's brow furrowed. A new Supreme Leader? That wasn't good. "Patch them through, then."

Aliana watched with anxiety as the holoterminal flickered to life, only for that anxiety to melt away as Finn's smiling face appeared before her.

"Dark Lady," he said playfully. "I'd like to negotiate the First Order's complete and total surrender."

Aliana practically laughed in disbelief. Of all the damn pranks to pull at a time like this. "...Supreme Leader, when this is all over... I owe you a drink."

Finn smirked. "Why wait? I have a feeling negotiations are going to go very well either way."

"By the Kriffing stars, I can't believe you actually did it," Aliana said. "You absolute madman."

"Shame on you for not having any faith in us," Finn said with a feigned chiding. "Though we did pick up someone unexpected along the way."

"Unexpected? Who?"

As if on cue, another person stepped into view of the holo. A quite familiar helmet and a set of black robes. "Dark Lady," he greeted with a nod.

"Ap'lek?" Aliana balked.

"My name is Jaden, actually," he said before taking off his helmet to reveal his face. His eyes were burning yellow with the Dark Side, and his dark complexion was marred by a burn scar on the left side of his jaw.

"Well *Jaden*, you played a part in venting my wife into space," Aliana scowled, folding her arms.

"...I am prepared to face the consequences for that," Jaden said.

Aliana's frown deepened. "Whether or not you live will depend on whether or not *she* lives. Until now, you're under the Supreme Leader's watch. Understood?"

"Yes, Dark Lady," Jaden nodded.

"Good," Aliana said, turning to Rose. "Clear out the rest of the ground forces. Get some relief crews down to Theed to repair the damage to the city while we take the fleet back to Odessen."

"Right away," Rose nodded. "Shall we inform the Queen that the battle is won?"

"I'll inform her once we're in Hyperspace," Aliana said. "The Sion, the Traya, the Imperius and the Null will stay behind to coordinate the First Order's surrender. Everyone else... it's time to get them home. Wounded and dead first."

"I'll stay back to coordinate," Finn said. "You, Rose and Poe should head back."

"Really? You don't want Poe to stay here with you?" Rose asked, folding her arms. "I mean, it seems only fair. Considering he was also kept out of the loop of your little plan."

Finn opened his mouth. Then closed it. "...Ah. That's right," he said, visibly sheepish. "That, uh... that's gonna be a whole talk, isn't it?"

"I'd put money on it," Rose said with a nod.

"Just... I'll talk to him when I get back," Finn said sheepishly.

Both women smirked as they shut off the comm.

By the time the shuttle touched down on Odessen, the entire base was still in an intense celebration. People were popping bottles of ale, families were hugging, the Stormtrooper children were burning an effigy of Snoke, two women were kissing while Klaud was watching them, that was odd. Aliana smiled at the sight, being heralded as a hero to the Galaxy by the people who mattered, whispers among the Sith crew about when she would begin her liberation of the Outer Rim. All around her, people were drinking, throwing food, enjoying the first moments of pure, unbridled joy they'd had in a very long time.

"Dark Lady!" one woman cheered as Aliana stepped off the shuttle, a cloth-wrapped bundle hauled over her shoulder. "Welcome home!"

"Thanks," Aliana said, stepping past her. "Good to be back with the taste of victory."

The cheers followed Aliana all the way to the war room, deep in the wall of the canyon. There, Leia was sat by the holoterminal watching the status updates. But Aliana could tell that she was watching but not truly paying attention. Her eyes were glazed over. Distant. Dejected.

"Hey," she said softly, bringing the General's eyes up. She set the wrapped body down on the table beside her, and watched as realization crept onto Leia's eyes. "I didn't take his head, just as you asked."

Leia didn't say anything for a moment, her eyes still fixed on the table. Slowly, gingerly, she lifted a hand to part the cloth wrapping around the head. Her gaze fell upon a face she had not personally seen in years. The face of the man who made it his life's mission to rule the galaxy through fear and brute force. The face of her son. Now gone.

She'd felt his death through the Force, and the tremor immediately before when Aliana tore apart the bond between him and Rey. In those hours, she had gone through every feeling possible. Wondering if she could have done things differently to prevent this. Regret over her son's crimes against the woman stood before her. Grief over the loss of her family.

All of them were gone now. She was the only one left. Han was dead. Luke was dead. Ben was dead. And even before then, she'd had to watch her parents die. Watch Obi-Wan die. She was utterly alone.

"...Thank you," she said quietly.

"Are you going to be okay?" Aliana asked.

"Is a parent ever okay after they lose their child?" Leia asked quietly.

Aliana's lips pressed into a thin line, regretting her rather foolish question almost immediately.

Leia sighed, her head hanging low. "... I'm sorry. That wasn't fair. You're the last person who deserves to hear my moping."

"No, no it's fine," Aliana said, laying a hand on Leia's back. She reached into her pocket and pulled out a small piece of carved wood attached to a braided string. "Here. He had this on him. It fell off in the battle."

Tired eyes widened as they fell upon the trinket, Leia carefully taking it into her hand. She simply stared at it, as though she couldn't believe what it was she was looking at. "...I made this for him," she whispered. "A long time ago. When he was just a boy."

Aliana leaned forward slightly. "Oh?"

"He... had shown signs of his power," Leia continued, her voice growing thick. "Luke was getting ready to take him to be trained. I made this for him so..." She paused, swallowing back the emotions that bubbled in the back of her throat. "...So he'd always have a part of me with him wherever he went."

Aliana rubbed Leia's back in small circles, saying nothing.

"Is it wrong for me to have wanted things to have gone differently?" Leia asked.

Aliana shook her head. "If they had, a lot of people would still be alive right now. My mother included. So no, I don't think it's wrong for you to want that," she said. "Do you need anything? Tea maybe?"

Leia shook her head. "No. But thank you," she said softly. "I know this must be infuriating, seeing me grieving over-"

"No," Aliana cut across her, her hand moving to her shoulder. "I've had my vengeance. It's over. I won't deny you your grief."

Leia looked over her shoulder. "You... You can't actually mean that," she said with a slight rasp, her eyes starting to glass.

"I can," Aliana nodded, her answer earning more bewilderment from Leia's expression. "My mother's been avenged and my wife is safe. That's all I needed from this. And now it's done."

Leia felt a tear slide down her cheek. Out of everything she expected, that hadn't been it. Truth be told, she was expecting any amount of revenge to not be enough for the Sith. That she would return angrier than before and desiring to take further revenge on the rest of the Republic. It was what she had been bracing herself for. But instead, it seemed as if vengeance had truly brought Aliana peace and quelled the rage in her heart. She clutched the braided string in her hands, a sob escaping her despite her best attempts. Her vision blurred with a renewed sting of tears as she slumped against the table. Over the last bit of family she somehow managed to outlive. Family of blood and family of choice. Even the one that was meant to live past her. All of them were gone. Lost to this war. And yet she remained. Living to fight and struggle another day. The tears fell upon the body before her, its cloth wrapping growing dark from the moisture.

Aliana watched Leia break down, wondering if she should continue to comfort her or give her privacy. "Leia, do you want me to leave and give you-"

She was cut off when Leia stood up and pulled Aliana into a hug, crying into her shoulder.

“I... uh... okay...” Aliana said, nervously returning the hug. She laid a hand on Leia’s back as the old general cried. She hadn’t been lying. In the wake of the bastard finally dying and her wife being free of the bond, Aliana was met with a sense of tranquility she hadn’t felt in a very long time. She no longer felt anything toward the two Jedi who had hounded her for so long beyond the barest contempt. They were dead, and they no longer mattered.

As she held the grieving mother, she looked up and caught her reflection in a mirror.

A pair of deep brown eyes looked back at her. Eyes she hadn’t seen in eleven years.

Rey was sat up and eating a bowl of gruel when Aliana knocked on the door to her room, sticking her head inside. “Knock knock,” she said with a bright smile. “Is that my wife awake and healthy?”

Emotions bubbled in Rey’s chest. After spending galaxy knows how long comatose, her mind trapped in some almost hellish projection of the Force’s will and practically helpless to do anything about the chaos surrounding her in the physical world, the sight of her wife and her impossibly beautiful smile was enough to make her cry. She put the gruel aside, giving Aliana her full attention. “Awake, yes. Healthy... somewhat,” she said.

Aliana stepped into the room, at Rey’s bedside in a heartbeat. “Aw don’t say that, sweetheart,” she cooed. “You look great!”

Rey said nothing in response, instead lifting an arm that had managed to lose a fair bit of muscle mass in her comatose state. “I woke up being unable to walk on my garbage jelly legs,” she deadpanned, though not without the threat of a smirk behind it. “I swear, you get launched in the vacuum of space one time and the next thing you know you’re completely out of shape.”

Aliana smiled and wrapped her arms around Rey’s shoulders. “I’m sure you’ll get back in shape right away,” she said. “What was the prognosis?”

“My heart ruptured,” Rey explained. “Had to be replaced with cybernetics. According to 2V it went off without a hitch.”

Aliana’s smile widened and she squeezed her tighter. “Well I’m glad you’re safe. Glad that you’re alive,” she said, kissing her cheek. “How do you feel now that the dyad’s been severed?”

Rey’s smile grew warmer, jubilation bubbling in her chest. “I almost didn’t believe it before I woke up,” she admitted. “Even when I was out I felt absolute silence when it happened. It was liberating. I thought I was slipping closer to death, and then I woke up and I hadn’t felt more relieved in my life. It felt too good to be true.”

Aliana settled in beside her. “I’m so happy for you, *nulis* .”

“What was it like breaking it?” Rey asked.

“It was... an experience,” Aliana confessed. “I’d never seen the vergence scatter before, and I never expected it to look like... *that* .”

“Did it ever feel like you were standing upon glass?” Rey asked.

“It did,” Aliana nodded. “How did you know?”

“I’ve had... similar visuals in my head before,” Rey said with a slight shrug. “The Force was especially noisy during that time. Not shutting up and yet not saying anything.”

Aliana nodded. “I’ve heard of the vergence scatter before. It exists inside the Force itself, but few have ever really breached it. Makes sense a Force bond would be severed from there.”

Rey smiled, adjusting herself to rest her cheek against the top of Aliana’s head. She truly felt lighter than she had in years, all thanks to her wife. It truly felt too good to be true now. Her mind was silent. No noise, no background thoughts, no taunts, no flashes of memories that weren’t her own. The Dyad was gone forever. Kylo Ren was gone forever. The war was won and everyone she held dear made it to the very end. Not even the Force was able to stop them, for all it tried.

That thought caused Rey’s smile to fade slightly. “...Do you think it will try and punish us for this?”

“I don’t think so,” Aliana shook her head. “It’s will has already been flagrantly defied. It’s been thoroughly dominated. I think it will leave us alone, if only out of fear.”

Rey chuckled. “It’s hard to imagine you instilling fear in anyone. Much less the Force.”

Aliana blinked, almost looking aghast at Rey. “And what is that supposed to mean?”

“It means you are too short and far too pretty to be scary,” Rey said, her grin mischievous as she kissed Aliana’s cheek.

“Excuse me! I strike fear into the hearts of men!” Aliana said indignantly.

“Because men are cowards by default,” Rey said matter of factly. “Poe and Finn are brave as they come so they saw through your clever Sithly ruse from the word go.”

“Excuse you! Finn was trembling when I met him!” Aliana scoffed.

“He was trembling at me and these deadly weapons,” Rey said with a grin, lifting an arm to flex her bicep.

A beat of silence passed before Aliana snickered. “Oh wow. You’re right. You did lose some muscle mass when you were out.”

Rey frowned and looked at her arm. It was noticeably smaller. “...How long was I out?”

“Two weeks.”

“TWO WEEKS?!” Rey balked.

“You think you recover from being vented into space quickly?” Aliana smiled, wrapping her arms around her and kissing her forehead.

“Unbelievable,” Rey bemoaned. “That’s it. As soon as possible and putting the muscle back on.”

“Or you could take the time to just enjoy the peace we just won ourselves,” Aliana said softly, her nose brushing against Rey’s cheek as she spoke.

Rey whined softly and nuzzled into her wife. "...You're taking all of this pretty well," she remarked. "For someone who just came back from a battle after nearly losing her wife, you're practically cheerful."

"You know, it's strange," Aliana said, pulling back. "I feel... lighter. I don't feel like there's these shackles dragging me down any more."

Rey's brow furrowed slightly. " *You* feel lighter? I thought I was the one bound to a Dyad here."

"I think it's just... *good* to know that they're finally dead," Aliana said, snuggling up beside Rey. "They tormented me for so long, I couldn't sleep without having nightmares about them. And now... they're gone. I feel like I can relax for the first time in over a decade..."

Brown eyes widened in realization. That's right. She had nearly forgotten that with Kylo Ren dead, both the men who murdered Tahleea were gone. Aliana had her complete vengeance. She outlasted both of them. "I'm glad," she said softly. "You deserved to see your revenge come to fruition."

Aliana smiled and met her gaze. "Thank you."

Rey gasped softly, laying a hand on Aliana's cheek. "Alie... your eyes..."

"Oh yeah," Aliana laughed. "I noticed that earlier. Guess they really are the windows to the soul, huh?"

Rey smiled and pulled her closer. She stared right into her wife's eyes, giddiness bubbling in her chest as she did. She has suspected something like this would happen. Aliana's eyes had turned brown shortly after she was eviscerated by Kylo Ren. In her weakness, the Force had become weak in her. She wondered if finally knowing peace would bring her natural color out permanently. She had been nervous about it at first. Aliana's piercing red eyes were the first thing she noticed about her, and she'd come to love that ruby gaze and thought she would miss it. But her natural eyes, that warm, deep shade of brown, just felt so... inviting. So comfortable. It was like the last of her calculating mask falling away, showing her completely the real Aliana. The one who would snuggle under her chin while reading a book, and hummed ewok tunes when she cooked, and had to try seven different computer passwords before she remembered which one was hers.

In that moment, Rey realized that brown eyes were truly the most beautiful. "They're stunning," she said, brushing her thumb just under her lashes. "You're just... so pretty."

Aliana giggled at that, tilting her head slightly to graze her lips against Rey's palm. "Why Master Jedi," she began with a feigned huff. "How utterly blasphemous of you to marvel at the distractions of the flesh. Truly the immaterial and the ethereal are more worthy of your praise?"

"Maybe, but my wife is hot, sue me," Rey scoffed, pulling her closer and snuggling under her chin.

Aliana snorted, throwing her forearm over her head dramatically. "Truly you've succumbed to temptation! The Jedi Order shall crumble into dust once again!"

"Good riddance," Rey murmured, wrapping her arms tightly around Aliana. "Now hold me, I'm sick."

Aliana smiled, wrapping her arms around Rey. She settled against the pillows and let her eyes flutter closed. After finally having her vengeance, all that was left was her future with her wife.

And that brought her a sense of peace that she had never known before.

Leia, Tahraya, Aliana, Rey and Holdo gathered around the holoterminal as the image of the new Chancellor, Borsk Fey'lya, flickered to life. This was a confrontation that none of them were looking forward to, but all of them knew was inevitable.

"Chancellor Fey'lya," Leia greeted, her tone cordial and professional. "I hope you're well."

Fey'lya simply narrowed their eyes. "As well as I can be having to corral a Republic that was soundly thrown into chaos."

"Thrown into chaos," Aliana scoffed. "One election is chaos now?"

"It is when the previous Chancellor is assassinated in the safety of his own chambers by a Sith Lord, Successor to Sidious," Fey'lya hissed.

Rey scowled at that, stepping closer to the holoterminal. As though to shield Aliana from Fey'lya. "Chancellor, I know for a fact that the Republic received the evidence that Kylo Ren's fear mongering campaign regarding Palpatine's return was a lie."

"The people of the Republic are beyond the point of caring, lap dog," Fey'lya said bitterly.

Aliana stepped forward and wrapped an arm around Rey. "So, is the Republic afraid of me?"

"The Republic is done pretending that you were ever anything more than our enemy, Amorosa," Fey'lya said firmly. "And so long as I am Chancellor, the core worlds shall never forget. From this day forward, you are public enemy number one. You and all your traitorous accomplices shall never again be welcome beyond the Outer Rim."

Aliana simply narrowed her eyes at the Chancellor, the urge to reach through the Force and snap their neck as well rising. That this one only had harsh words for her was what quelled that temptation. There was no point if all this self important bag of hot air had was blustering to throw at her.

"Beyond the outer rim. That's a bold claim, Chancellor," Aliana said. "But it means nothing. The Sith Fleet has no desire to be welcome into the arms of the Republic, and I won't tolerate any aggression taken against my people."

Fey'lya turned a scowl toward Queen Tahraya. "And the Naboo are content to stand beside this monster?"

Tahraya pursed her lips, glancing at Aliana. "...The Republic never came to Naboo's aid during the first blockade, and they sanctioned the second. After the Galactic Civil War, the people of Naboo have faced nothing but scorn and prejudice from the Republic at large, who all decided we must bear the weight of Palpatine's crimes. Allying with the Sith has seen my people protected, where the Republic only threatened them. I would be a poor leader not to stand beside her. She has proven her word is worth more than the Senate's. I must think of my people, and the Republic has done nothing but endanger them."

"And do you think the Sith will continue to protect Naboo now that you've already given them what they want?" the Chancellor challenged.

“That’s the thing, Chancellor. I haven’t yet given her what she wants,” Tahraya said. “The debt has yet to be paid.”

Fey’lya’s brow furrowed. “What?”

“That’s not for your ears, though,” Tahraya said, turning and marching out of the war room. “Goodbye, Chancellor.”

“Excuse me! We are not do-”

The connection was cut, Fey’lya’s garbled facsimile flickering out with a blip.

“Well that was immediately exhausting,” Rey said with a sigh, nearly going limp in Aliana’s arms. “I swear politics just sapped all the strength out of me. How do any of you have the energy or patience for it?”

“Hard learned spite,” Leia said matter of factly.

Aliana sighed. “I admire your tenacity. I don’t have the patience for politics.”

“And yet... you’re planning to build an Empire?” Leia arched a brow.

“Build? Yes. Lead? No,” Aliana shook her head. “You won’t see me wearing the title of Empress.”

Leia’s brow raised. “Really?”

“Indeed,” Aliana nodded. “There is too much work involved in that, and I have no interest in the crash course necessary to lay out the foundations. I’ll leave that job to the qualified people.”

Tahraya smiled at that. “Well, if you are looking for templates, there are worse forms of government to emulate than Naboo’s.”

Aliana glanced at Tahraya. “That’s actually what I wanted to talk to you about before the fleet moved into Hutt space,” she said, letting go of Rey and approaching her. “...I would like you to be the Sith Empress.”

The smile on Tahraya’s face faltered just a fraction at that. She released a small, incredulous puff of laughter, her brow furrowing ever so slightly. Quite a Queenly reaction of Rey ever saw one. “...You’re serious?”

Her question was met with a simple smile and nod. “Leia told me about your anxieties about political rivals trying to overturn your decision to help me after your term is up. Among other reasons, I think this would be an ideal solution to that.”

“I... but I don’t even have the Force, I couldn’t-”

“There’s already a Dark Lady,” Aliana said, taking Tahraya’s hands and squeezing them. “I think I would prefer an Empress that is without the Force.”

The smile dropped from Tahraya’s face entirely, professional decorum completely overturned by surprise. Wonder even. “That is... a remarkably profound approach to take, Dark Lady.”

“Thank you,” Aliana said. “So... what do you say?”

The Queen took a deep breath, releasing it slowly. For a while, she simply did not say anything. Contemplating in silence. In truth, Aliana was beginning to wonder if she was thinking of an excuse to turn down the offer. "...I would be honored to represent this new Sith Empire, Amorosa. Thank you."

"No, thank *you* ," Aliana smiled, letting go of her hands.

"I suppose I will be entrusted with how to establish our overarching government, then?" Tahraya asked. "I may have to brush up on my Sith history then. Understand where they succeeded and failed and so forth."

"We'll worry about that when the Hutt worlds are freed," Aliana assured her. "For now, knowing there's an experienced leader at the helm puts my mind at ease. Thank you... *Empress* ."

"The honor is all mine, Dark Lady," Tahraya said warmly. "And what about you, Rey? What is the future of the Jedi in these unprecedented times?"

Rey groaned, pinching the bridge of her nose. "The future of the Jedi can wait exactly where it is. In the future. I do not have the energy or patience to begin unpacking any of that right now."

"I understand," Tahraya nodded. "Excuse me, I must return to Naboo with my people. But keep me posted."

"Of course, Empress," Rey nodded.

"Get those palettes loaded onto the freighters," Aliana commanded as the Sith fleet was preparing to leave Oddessen. Wild Space was now too far out of the way for their business, and everyone was moving to Naboo to begin preparations for the invasion of the Outer Rim. Talon agreed to lead the campaign so Aliana and Rey could have some much needed rest, but that didn't stop Aliana from making sure everything was ready to go.

As they were dismantling the base, another ship touched down. A First Order shuttle. Out came Finn, Jannah and a Knight of Ren.

"Morning everyone," Aliana greeted, her expression turning far colder as she turned her attention to the Knight. "Jaden, was it?"

"Correct," Jaden said, craning down at the hip with a bow. If he carried any anxiety or fear regarding this encounter, he hid it well enough. "A pleasure to meet you again, Lady Amorosa."

"I'm sure it is," Aliana said stiffly, her fingers itching to reach for her lightsaber. "I hope you understand the only reason I am not breaking several of your bones right now is to allow my wife the honor of such at her earliest convenience."

Jaden tensed and straightened his posture. "Of course," he said.

"So, how'd the rebellion go?" Aliana asked, turning her attention to Finn and Jannah.

"Most of them surrendered," Finn explained. "They've all been through a lot, and it's going to be a long recovery."

"I imagine," Aliana nodded. "Most of them haven't had real lives, have they?"

“No they haven’t,” Finn said. “The Republic tried to reach out to us, by the way. Looking for an opening to get at you.”

“Of course they were,” Aliana sighed. “I take it you didn’t want them to just become soldiers for a different army.”

Finn nodded. “They deserve more than to be cannon fodder, Alie.”

“I can understand that. How about freight work for now? Straightforward job, lots of downtime on routes for therapy,” she suggested.

“That would probably be best,” Jannah said, nodding. “We found a handful of Force Sensitives about them as well. We’re debating on how soon they should be made aware.”

“Well I guess that depends on how soon they each want to do something about that,” Aliana said, folding her arms. “If any of them are looking to become Jedi, they’re either going to have to wait on Rey or learn from you two.”

“We’ll sort all of that out,” Finn nodded. “It’s going to be a long road for all of them.”

“For all of *us*,” Aliana nodded, before signaling to a soldier. “Put this Knight in restraints and take him to the war room.”

The soldier nodded before advancing on Jaden.

“This hardly seems necessary, don’t you think?” Jaden asked, lips pressed into a thin line.

Aliana simply fixed him with an unimpressed, contemptible sneer. “According to Finn and Jannah, you did very little to help our cause until after their Rebellion was properly roused. You have done nothing to establish trust or demonstrate loyalty, only to save your own hide. That I even intend on giving you the chance should stand testament to my compassion, Jedi.”

Jaden gritted his teeth and held his hands out so the soldier could restrain him, before leading him toward the central base. “Rey’s probably going to break his nose,” Finn remarked as he was led away.

“Yeah probably,” Aliana nodded. “It’s alright, some bacta and he’ll be fine save for some bellyaching.”

“How much bellyaching should we expect?” Jannah asked, unable to suppress a smirk as she watched.

“I’d say Rey would only have to crack her knuckles once afterwards before he gets over it,” Aliana said, matching the smirk.

“Oh, well that’s good,” Finn smiled. “What about the Republic?”

“The Chancellor called, declared anyone who stood beside me to be traitors to the Republic and put a bounty on my head,” Aliana said with a shrug. “But we all saw that coming. Anyone who didn’t was kidding themselves.”

“How soon do you think until they decide to go to war?” Jannah asked.

“I don’t think they will,” Aliana said. “I think they’re waiting for me to invade. The Republic spews a lot of bullshit, but it’s sincerely believed bullshit.”

“I hope you’re right,” Finn said, his smile fading. “If I never see another war in my lifetime, it will be too soon.”

“Then I won’t conscript you into the Outer Rim invasion,” Aliana chuckled, patting Finn’s shoulder. “Listen, I know I wasn’t all that supportive of this rebellion idea, but... you really pulled off the impossible. I’m proud of you.”

“Thanks,” Finn said, placing a hand over Aliana’s. His expression sobered, though it was not somber. “It means a lot that you gave us this chance. I don’t know if I could have lived with myself if we didn’t at least try. I’d spend the rest of my life just wondering ‘what if’ you know?”

Aliana’s smile grew softer. “I completely understand. And I’m sorry for doubting you.”

Finn smiled and stepped closer, pulling Aliana into a hug that she happily returned.

“Oh wow, Rey was right. You *are* cuddly,” she sighed.

“Yeah. I get that a lot,” Finn chuckled, squeezing tighter.

Aliana pulled away and smiled. “Anything else I should be aware of?”

“We captured Ushar, but... she’s considerably less repentant,” Finn explained. “Keeps screaming ‘*Kinta filth*’ at me and Jannah.”

Aliana’s eyes widened, a sudden desire to commit brutal, bloody murder rising from deep within her. “...Does she, now?”

Finn nodded. “What’s Kinta mean, anyway? I can tell it’s ur’Kittat.”

“Don’t worry about it. Just know that in combination with ‘*filth*’ it is extremely vile,” Aliana said. “Kill her.”

Finn’s eyes widened and he actually took a step back from Aliana. “Okay then, I’ll take your word for it.”

“Good!” Aliana grinned, stepping back as well. “I’ve got to tend to my wife. Catch up later?”

“You got it.”

Borsk Fey’lya sat in his office, reading the updates on the war. The First Order had surrendered to the Resistance, the Stormtroopers had been given full pardons and relieved of duty, the officers were being executed en masse, and they’d even executed two of the last Knights of Ren and imprisoned the other.

Fey’lya could see the Sith’s aspirations clear as day. She was seizing the First Order’s ships and resources to have an assault force capable of invading the Republic. She might have made claims about a crusade in the Outer Rim, but he knew the truth. She was targeting Republic supply lines and business interests. Trying to choke them off economically to make them easier to conquer. But he was already preparing for such a thing. Already he was building up the Republic Fleet.

Constructing Dreadnoughts and Superweapons to make an assault on the Republic infeasible, as well as preparing for a sudden, unexpected move to an internal economy. When the Sith came for the Republic, she would be woefully underprepared.

Alas that wouldn't undo the damage the Sith had already done.

Han solo dead. Luke Skywalker dead. Mon Mothma dead. Naboo's secession. The corruption of the last of the Jedi. Even Leia Organa seemed to be firmly on the Sith's side now. It was a morale crisis for the New Republic. What was worse, his attempts to reach out to the lost Jedi Ahsoka Tano, Ezra Bridger and Kal Kestis turned up that they were dead as well, and had been for quite some time. They had managed to contact the Jedi Mara Jade, but she refused to rejoin the Republic. The Sith's doing, no doubt. It was clear there would be no Jedi Order coming to rally the galaxy. Another morale loss that Fey'lya didn't like having to deal with.

"Chancellor?" came the voice of his secretary, holding a datapad. "News from SIS. She said no."

Fey'lya took the datapad and looked it over. Seline Kae, a force sensitive who had refused Skywalker's call to train as a Jedi, was refusing his offer to join the Republic Navy, citing a conflict of interest where Darth Amorosa was concerned. Dammit, he thought, did the Sith have her hooks in *everyone* in the Outer Rim?!

"Thank you," he muttered to the Twi'lek. "Now get out." His secretary left, not wanting to be here while he was dwelling over the war. "Dammit Lanaver," he muttered. "Why did you hesitate on the First Order? Why did you let the Sith get a foothold in the Galaxy? You had her in your grasp, comatose and vulnerable and you let her go!" He had voted against letting Amorosa go when her Dark Jedi lapdog landed on Coruscant, but he had been out-voted. Sometimes he quite hated Democracy. Perhaps this wasn't unsalvageable. The Outer Rim was full of poors and dregs. They answered only to money. And it was something the Republic had in spades.

The Sith would see her day of reckoning. And he would personally put the blaster bolt between her eyes.

No Greater Honor

THE SITH EMPIRE ON THE RISE!

Early this morning, Supreme Chancellor Fey'lya, newly elected after the horrific assassination of Chancellor Lanaver Villecham, announced a state of emergency! The Sith Lord Darth Amorosa, previously operating under the guise of an ally against the First Order, has openly become hostile and is building up forces for war as we speak!

"It is with great sadness that we have allowed this to happen," Fey'lya said in an address to the people over the Holonet. "We allowed the Sith to operate with impunity as she slew the great heroes of the Republic, including Mon Mothma and Luke Skywalker! Rest assured that her, and the traitorous Resistance that shielded her, will face justice!"

The Republic fleet is preparing for an attack, however there is pressure on the Chancellor to strike preemptively. The Sith Fleet was last caught on sensors moving toward the Outer Rim, presumably targeting the Hutts and the interests of many wealthy donors to the Senate.

Triikka threw down the datapad. Reading any more of the news bulletins just made them sick. Listening to the Republic made them sick. Ever since they'd had to flee to Coruscant from the First Order's invasion of Malastare, their faith in the Republic was shot.

They were doing nothing, engaging in pointless skirmishes and not attacking priority targets, while the Resistance put the First Order in the ground. And now the Chancellor was looking for another scapegoat. But all they could do was seethe. They couldn't do anything of value from this tiny refugee apartment. They could only be angry.

It was a sentiment shared by many refugees. Few held any actual malice toward Amorosa. It was hard to, after news that the First Order had been destroyed by the Sith Fleet came through. Those monsters had taken their homes. Their destruction only brought them joy that no Republic propaganda could take away. Plans were underway to retake their homes, and liberate the Outer Rim. And word through the grapevine was that Lord Talon was looking for volunteers. It was sorely tempting for Triikka. But if they took it, they would never have shelter in the Republic again. Joining the Sith was tantamount to treason.

But perhaps that wasn't a bad thing.

Leia sat alone at a table, nursing a cup of caff. She was been thinking about a great many things over the last twenty four hours. Mostly about Ben. She kept thinking back to when he was little. A happy child who was adored by his parents. Things seemed so idyllic back then. So happy. These days they felt like a distant memory. A figment of some long-forgotten dream. She wondered where she'd gone wrong. Someone isn't just born like this. She used to blame the Dark Side. It was easy. It was simple. Too simple, in fact, and that idea was shattered in the form of a young woman absolutely teeming with the Dark Side, yet behaved more like a frightened spider than a harbinger of darkness.

No. Ben's fall was his own doing. And the exact reasons why would likely forever remain a mystery. He wanted to be this, right up until the very end.

That didn't give her much comfort, however. Losing her son still hurt dearly. She'd grappled with the guilt for a few weeks when she'd accepted that Ben was never coming home. The contradiction between grieving her son and all the victims he'd left in his wake. Surprisingly, it had been one of the victims he'd scarred most severely to assuage her guilt.

'If things had gone differently, a lot of people would still be alive right now. My mother included. So no, I don't think it's wrong for you to want that.'

It had been hard to accept that she didn't need to feel guilty for mourning her son. For wanting things to have gone differently. For wanting him to have abandoned the First Order and come home. For wanting him to have never turned on the Jedi Order in the first place. For wanting him to have not committed his first great act of evil all those years *before* even then.

But Leia wasn't just mourning Ben. Exactly what he'd become, what he'd done, and the lamenting what may have been, had taken her a long time to accept. And in that time, she had so much denial and grief and anger. Anger that she had taken out on an undeserving girl.

Though things had improved between them, Leia was filled with a great deal of shame toward how she'd treated Aliana. Lashing out at her, spying on her, trying to convince Rey to leave her, and trying to get her excised from the Resistance. It had been absolutely disgusting behavior that Aliana endured for quite some time until the Resistance stepped in to put distance between them. She hadn't really reconsidered her opinion on Aliana until the girl's mask broke and she broke down into grief-stricken tears, completely overwhelmed by the stress of being doubted on all sides. It was the first time Aliana's mask had broken in front of her, and what she saw was a scared child crying out for her mother.

Even before her mask cracked, Aliana's composure always seemed a little forced. The swagger was just a little too emphatic, the smirks that seemed to curl a little too high, the witty barbs that always turned into very impassioned arguments if pushed just a little too much. Indeed it was all things she had seen in Ben when he was fourteen and trying to act tough. Leia had ignored those signs that she was faking it. When Aliana put on the posture of a calculating Sith, it had been easier to forget that she was still very young. That everything from her appearance to her ship suggested a much more distressed and disorganized life than what a card carrying Sith would have.

It had been easier to forget that she was a person, and not a force of nature.

Leia's behavior was dehumanizing, and abusive. And Aliana had kept hidden just how much the abuse was hurting her until she could hide it no longer. Underneath all the bluster, threats and rhetoric, she was still that scared 14 year old girl surrounded by Jedi. Fearing for her life.

Leia stood up, her caff abandoned, and marched out of the mess hall. Aliana was just outside, going through the manifest of the latest transport and supply ships.

"Alie?" she said softly.

Aliana looked up. "Yeah?"

"We need to talk," Leia said. She could see Aliana's jaw tense, and waved her down. "It's nothing bad. Well, nothing new, at least."

Aliana relaxed and nodded. "Okay. What's up?"

Leia clasped her hands together. "I owe you an apology," she said. "From the moment you joined the Resistance, up until very recently, I've treated you with distrust, animosity, and abuse. You were right. I was taking my denial over Ben out on you. And you didn't deserve that."

She took a step closer and laid both hands on Aliana's shoulders.

"You are a kind, caring, and generous woman," she said. "You've been a shining example of the kind of compassion that any Jedi would aspire to. You even took pity on a grieving old woman who treated you terribly. It was unfair of me to treat you as I have, and I am so sorry."

Aliana's eyes were wide as saucers. Though things between her and Leia had simmered down, an apology was the last thing she expected from her. Almost as unexpected as the treacherous sting in her eyes. "I... I uh..." she took a deep breath, and reached up to dab her eyes. "Thank you, Leia. That... I needed to hear that."

"You're a good person. And I'm sorry I treated you otherwise," Leia said, letting go of her.

Aliana sniffled as her eyes started to water. "Thank you."

"Are you going to be okay?"

"Yeah, just... just a little emotional," Aliana said, giving a weak smile.

"This was hard on you, wasn't it?"

Aliana nodded. "For a while I was afraid to go to sleep," she said. "Afraid someone might attack me when I was vulnerable."

Leia's heart broke at that. That Aliana still continued fighting in a Resistance she didn't feel safe around for the longest time was both a testament to her convictions, and also a harsh condemnation of Leia's actions. Some fight have found Aliana's ability to endure misery and suffering inspiring. Leia only saw it as tragic. She was only able to endure it because she was forced to.

"I promise, I will never contribute to that again," Leia assured her. "You're a good kid. And I'm sure your mother would be proud of you."

Aliana dabbed her eyes again and nodded. "She *is* proud of me."

"That's good," Leia said. "I hope I can make things better between us."

"This is a start," Aliana nodded. "Thank you, Leia."

"You're welcome," Leia said, backing away and returning to the mess hall.

Aliana took a few deep breaths and waved at her eyes, trying not to cry. Not that she was still afraid of anyone seeing her crying, she'd just spent an hour on her kohl and didn't want to ruin it. Once she was certain she wasn't going to start crying, she sat down on a crate to think.

This marked a new period of her life. She had Rey, and was certain she was going to recover completely. She had closure for her mother's murder, and an end to over a decade of uncertainty and instability. And people were starting to recognize the real Aliana Beniko. She was no longer bound by any chains holding her down. The future was bright.

Perhaps... perhaps she really could honor her mother's last request.

She reached over and picked up her holocom, punching in a frequency that, until now, she hadn't been certain she would ever use. A man nearing his fifties with dark skin, short curly hair, and a regal Senator's robe answered. "This is Senator Tira- Oh... Lady Amorosa," he said awkwardly. "Hello."

Aliana felt a wedge form in her throat. She swallowed it down and smiled. "Hey... Dad."

Aliana would never forget the surprise on Yensin Tiralli's face when she said that, nor the way he started crying immediately afterward.

Leia's back was aching as she set a bundle of wood down on the stone platform. An hour gathering wood for the pyre, and she wasn't anywhere close. It would be midnight before she was finished, and who knows what damage she would do to herself when-

There was a clack, and she looked up to see another bundle of wood being laid down on the rock. She looked up higher, and saw Rey looking back at her.

"Alie told me about what you said to her," she said, laying another down. It was only then that Leia noticed there were twelve bundles floating behind her. "That was very good of you."

Leia nodded and sat back as Rey stacked the pyre for her. "Thank you," she murmured. "I feel like a fool..."

"Well, Alie's willing to give you a chance to have a better relationship. And if she is, then I am too," Rey said, stacking the last bundle. "I'm sure Han would have liked it. He liked the both of us."

"I heard," Leia nodded, getting up and moving to the stretcher containing the wrapped body. "Heard he comforted her on the Falcon."

Rey nodded. "He did. According to Alie, he was the first person in a long time to learn she was Sith and not think poorly of her."

Leia gave a sad smile. "Yeah. Despite what he might have said otherwise, Han was always pretty quick to see the good in people. Especially in the younger generations."

Rey matched Leia's somber expression. "...I wish I could have had the time to get to know him better."

"You'd have liked him. The two of you were... very similar," Leia said, her hands stilling on the strings, and then gave a small laugh. "Especially where pretty girls were concerned."

Rey blinked, a crinkle of befuddlement in her brow. "...How, exactly, do you figure, General?"

"Being all but nonfunctional when a pretty girl is in the room. Shooting for someone well past your league and somehow succeeding. Utterly fumbling your way through romantic gestures and appearing all the more endearing for it," Leia said, her smile taking a mischievous glint. "Take your pick."

Rey's cheeks flushed a bright red. "That... that is... that's not..." then she huffed in defeat. "I'll leave you to burn him," she said, turning on her heel and striding off.

Leia chuckled as Rey left the room, though it was quick to fade in the absence of company. In that absence, she had realized that she had managed to smile, laugh even, in the presence of her son's carcass. Her stomach coiled with unease as she couldn't help but wonder what that might have said about her. She took a moment simply to look at the pyre. At the wrapped body laid atop of it. This was it. The last remaining loved one she had. Dead and gone. Everyone else was either fair weathered friends all scattered to the cosmic winds, or easily reprogrammable droids. None were present but her. She had outlived her entire family.

Again.

She bent down and lit the tinder, watching as the fire slowly grew and engulfed her son. Maybe this was her time. Time to just let go, become one with the Force. Now she didn't even have the Republic she fought so hard for. Perhaps it really was time.

"Don't do it."

She whirled around, surprised to see Poe standing there. "What are you doing here?"

"If you think everyone just conveniently forgot to keep an eye on you, you're wrong," Poe said, laying a hand on her shoulder. "I know what you're thinking. Don't do it."

Leia's eyes fell closed, her eyes suddenly feeling a lot heavier. She didn't need to see the flames grow into a roaring blaze to devour Ben. This close, she felt it against her face. The heat of the pyre did little to distract from the ache that settled deep in her bones. "...I don't see why I shouldn't, really."

The hand on her shoulder slid to wrap around the other. "Because this isn't the end. Not really."

"My family is gone," Leia said. "I have nothing left. Not even the Republic."

"That's not true," Poe said. "I know at least three people who would love for you to remain in their lives. Who care very deeply about you. Who need you."

Leia sagged, as though she had aged another eighty years on the spot. Every fiber of her being felt stretched to its absolute limit. She was too weary to even talk about any of this. Alas, there was that insistent, stubborn attitude deep within her that knew that she had to talk about this. "...I'm just tired, Poe," she whispered. "I'm so tired. I don't think I have it in me to be what they need me to be."

"Well, I think we need you to just be, Leia," Poe said, managing a smile. "War's over, after all. We don't need a General. We don't need a Princess. We don't need someone to lead or inspire us to carry any more weight on her shoulders. We just need a loved one."

Leia felt numb. Almost... empty. "...Are you sure about that? I was very cruel to one of them."

"Well that one just called you her mother-in-law about twenty minutes ago," Poe shrugged. "So... maybe it's something to think about. I mean, her and Rey are going to be adopting little ones very soon. Someone's got to be there to get them hopped up on sugar."

Leia scoffed, but not with any true venom or bitterness. “So what? Live for the grandkids I never thought I’d have?”

Poe shrugged with a smirk. “There are worse reasons to keep going.”

For a moment, only the sounds of flames filled the air, Leia mulling over Poe’s words. The vision he had conjured in her head. “...I suppose that’s true.”

Poe nodded. “Something to think about at least,” he said, patting her shoulder before stepping away. “I’ll leave you to grieve.”

“Thank you.”

Rey would never again have a pulse. That was something that she was absolutely going to have to get used to. She would never hear or feel the blood in her veins slow down or pick up like drums for the rest of her life. Just a constant, steady whirring in her chest from her artificial heart. A constant, ever going cycle of circulation. Even now, as she was working up a sweat with another set of crunches, the only difference she could feel was the mechanisms wiring just a little faster beneath her ribs. Her body was eerily silent for what she was doing.

Everything about her felt quieter, body and soul. Even now, she find herself scarcely believing that the Dyad was truly severed. There were times now, often when Aliana wasn’t around, where she caught herself fearing that Ren would make himself known again. Reveal that their bond had never been severed and instead would allow him new life. But, think and fret as she might like, that moment never came. Just quiet.

Her life up to this point had been spent waiting for the future. Waiting for her parents to come back, waiting for the war to end, waiting for the bond to be broken. It seemed she was always pushing forward toward an end that never seemed to come. But now all of those things had come. The war was over, the bond was broken, and she had her family back. And now there was just the promise of getting to just *be* . To live her life without having to answer to anyone. It was a strange feeling. Stranger even than the whirring in her chest.

Strange. That had to be the most dominant feeling at the end of this, even if Rey felt terrible for thinking it. She should have been happy. Kylo Ren was gone forever. The First Order was gone forever. Aliana and she lived to see the end of them. Finn, Poe and the others survived as well. They now had security against the Republic. They had the freedom to just exist and be in love. She should have been happy. And she was.

But overtaking that happiness was this strange feeling. Perhaps because their victory was not perfect. Rey and Aliana both had their scars. They both came out of this war different people than when they came into it. They were both so battered and weary that neither of them were truly certain they would ever see it through to the end, or if it even would end. But it did. This giant, terrible war that took so much of them ended, and now Rey had next to no idea what to do about that. She could barely wrap her brain around it.

She fell back onto the floor, staring up at the ceiling. It was like she was truly aimless for the first time, but with the reminders of this terrible war whirring away deep in her chest. Was that it? Was she only allowed to move forward with her life if she carried this reminder with her?

Then her thoughts turned to her wife, who was also living with the reminders of this war. Her leg, her spine, they were something she would have to maintain for the rest of her life. It was then that Rey sat up as a realization struck her. Aliana had to live with an even bigger reminder in the sheer absence of her mother. How did she do it? How did she free herself from that pain? How did she seem to be able, eager even, to leave this war behind despite knowing what it took from her?

Or did she? Rey's thoughts turned back to almost two years ago, when they were flying to Takodana. When 2V had reminded her that it was time for a memorial. Aliana held a memorial for her mother every year. She'd even joined her for it on the last one just a month ago. Aliana carried the memories of her mother with her everywhere. They motivated her, they influenced her. They... inspired her. Was that it? Did she just... take those scars with her?

She pressed a hand against her chest, feeling the subtle whirring beneath her skin. The artificial heart that she would now carry with her for the rest of her life. A new reality that she simply had to accept. Just as Alie had to accept her mechanical parts. Perhaps they would lose more of them as time went on, or perhaps not. Perhaps Rey would forever miss the sound of her own heartbeat, or perhaps she would swiftly forget what it even sounded like. There was no telling at this point.

Rey frowned, crossing her arms on top of her knees and propping her chin against them. The newfound quiet within her left her plenty of time for these intrusive thoughts to take root. And she officially ran out of things on the ship to tinker with to take her mind off of them. More time and more silence for intrusive thoughts. Another paradigm shift she would have to get used to.

The solitude. She didn't like it. It reminded her too much of Jakku. Ironic, she spent fourteen years on Jakku alone and in total silence, and now she couldn't bear it. She reached over and picked up her comlink, punching in Aliana's frequency.

"Rey?" Aliana's voice came over the speaker. "Everything okay?"

"Everything's fine," Rey said. Not technically a lie, from a certain point of view. The galaxy wasn't currently on fire after all. "I just needed to hear your voice. It's too quiet on the ship right now."

Aliana made a small noise of sympathy, pursing her lips slightly. "Poor thing. Well I won't be much longer. Just ironing some things out with our new Sith Empress and I'll be home."

"Tell me about it," Rey said, leaning forward. "What can we expect from this fledgling Sith Empire?"

"Working on representatives," Aliana said. "Most drafting notes for how it'll actually govern itself. I was right asking Tahraya, I am not cut out for politics."

Rey took the comlink and moved to the sofa, laying down on it. Aliana's voice was making those intrusive thoughts melt away. "Could I come with you next time?"

"Of course," Aliana said with a soft giggle. "I'm surprised you want to come. I didn't think you liked politics either."

"I don't like Republic politics," Rey said. "I've yet to sample Empire politics. Maybe I'll like them better."

"Imperial."

“What?”

“Imperial politics,” Aliana said.

Rey scoffed. “Empire, Imperial, what’s the difference?”

“One is a noun, the other is a possessive tense,” Aliana giggled.

“Is that the thing Galactic Basic doesn’t have, but every other language does?” Rey asked.

“No, that’s habitual tense.”

“Is that when you feel like everyone in the room has anxiety?”

“That’s tension.”

“Is that temporary housing?”

“No, that’s a pair of tents.”

“Is that-”

“Rey!”

Rey giggled, and rolled onto her back, holding the comlink in both hands. “Aww c’mon!”

“Rey, I have work to do,” Aliana laughed.

“Okay. But leave me on so I can listen?” she asked.

“Really? It’s going to be kind of boring.”

“I’m fine with that,” Rey said, adjusting herself to remain comfortable.

“...Alright,” Aliana said, a smile in her voice. “You little weirdo.”

“You love me for that, though,” Rey said.

“I do... I do love you for that,” Aliana sighed, before Rey heard a small click. Aliana had set her comlink on the table. For the next hour, she listened to Aliana go through the infrastructure for a new government. She was right, it was incredibly boring. And Rey had taken the comlink into the bedroom to lie down somewhere more comfortable. But it wasn’t about what they were talking about. Aliana’s voice kept things from getting too silent. Too lonely. Those intrusive thoughts were kept at bay by her wife’s voice.

Maybe this was how Alie did it, she thought. Maybe a post-war life for them was never going to be one hundred percent sunshine and rainbows. But that’s why you held your loved ones close. To make everything else worth it. That’s something Rey could definitely do. She would miss the way her heart would pick up in Aliana’s presence, but her heart still belonged to her. No matter its form.

There was a bit of shuffling and static from the comm before Aliana’s voice came through again.

“You still there, darling?”

“I am,” Rey nodded.

“Good. Things are all wrapped up here for the day so I’ll be home soon.”

“Good,” Rey yawned, setting the comlink onto Aliana’s pillow. “Come join me in bed when you get here.”

Aliana giggled. “Sweetheart, you know the doctor said it’s going to be some time before you’re ready to get frisky. At least another month.”

“I just wanna cuddle with my wife, Alie!” Rey pouted. “Come on, I’m recovering from surgery. I need wife lovins.”

Aliana giggled louder. “Alright. Alright. As quick as the Dark Side will allow, I will be by your side again and give you some ‘wife lovins’.”

“Thank you.”

“Is that everything?” Jannah asked as she handed another manifest to Rose.

“Yeah, it should be,” Rose said, checking off everything on the datapad. “Should have celebrated *after* the cleanup. Just makes it feel anticlimactic.”

Jannah laughed at that, sitting down on one of the many crates of weapons. For the last two days they’d been cleaning up and dismantling the base. Most of the Resistance had been declared traitors to the Republic for working with the Sith, and those that hadn’t had bailed very quickly, taking solitary fighters to flee back to Republic Space. But for the rest of them, it was one big move out of Wild Space and to the Mid Rim. The Sith Fleet was already gearing up to retake their homes, and everyone else was looking to settle on Naboo.

“Well, Rey should have fun going through the scrap of those cruisers,” Jannah said with a lingering giggle.

Rose smiled as though she were recalling a fond memory. “Oh it was so satisfying to reduce those kriffing things to slag.”

“And you did an amazing job at it,” Jannah said. “I saw those tactics you used. You were quick as a whip from the word go. It was wild!”

Rose giggled softly, brushing her hair behind her ear. “Thanks. That railgun was fun to shoot. Always tore into the cruisers with a screech. So much more satisfying than phase cannons.”

“I bet,” Jannah said. “You really came through for us back there, Admiral.”

Despite that being her rank, something about the way Jannah said *Admiral* made something quiver inside Rose. “W-Well, I’m certainly no all-powerful, Jedi, but I know my stuff. I mean, you and Finn came through for us too. Planning that trooper rebellion was actually very inspired.”

This time, Jannah looked away bashfully. “Oh, it was more of a gamble than anything.”

“Well then, remind me never to challenge you to a game of cards,” Rose smiled.

Jannah laughed and rubbed the back of her neck. “Oh stop. I’m sure you’d clean out at the casino.”

“Hey, I know tactics. I know military strategy,” Rose said. “I can command a fleet no problem. But you and Finn can inspire people. That’s what gets people on deck.”

“You think you’re not inspiring?” Jannah asked. “Everyone could hear your commands over the comms. It was motivating. It was the sole source of morale in an outmatched fight. If it hadn’t been for you, their fleet would have rolled over us.”

Warmth blossomed in Rose’s cheeks. “W-Well, I don’t know about that? I was mostly just screaming at people what they needed to do. Efficient, maybe, but-”

“Inspiring,” Jannah said. “It was inspiring. Don’t sell yourself short, Rose. This victory was yours just as much as it was ours or Alie’s.”

Rose’s heart picked up in her chest, the warmth worsening. No, worsening wasn’t the word for this. Those negative connotations were not something she wanted to associate with Jannah. “You... *You* are a real sweetheart, you know that?” she asked that with a slight giggle in her voice.

Jannah’s cheeks darkened and she looked away, fixing her gaze on one of the spider droids. “Well it... it comes easy around you, I guess.”

“Is that the only thing that comes easy around me?” Rose blinked, clicking her mouth shut. By the stars, did she really just say that? Where did that come from? She dared to look at Jannah, finding that she looked just as surprised as her. “I-I am so sorry! That was- Oh, that was way out of line!”

“No no, it was just... unexpected,” Jannah said, pressing a hand to her cheek. By the stars, she was boiling. “And... well you... I mean I... you’re just so-”

“My quarters lock from the inside,” Rose said.

“Great!” Jannah exclaimed. She jumped up from the crate, and Rose dropped her datapad and the two of them ran off toward the officer quarters.

Twenty feet away, Rey and Finn were watching them leave. Rey reached into her cloak and handed Finn a credit chip. “Six minutes, good call,” she said.

“I can’t take all the credit,” Finn said, pocketing the chip. “Jannah confessed to having a thing for Rose on the shuttle to the Supremacy.”

“Oh, then gimme my chip back.”

“Nope, too late. It’s mine now, sucker!”

The base had been reduced to just the war room and power generator, which a crew was already dismantling. The last of the transport ships were ready to leave, and only one cargo ship had yet to be filled. Aliana had decided to take a walk around what remained of the base before leaving. It had been a year ago when they’d landed on Odessen and made their base inside an empty canyon. Though she’d been unconscious for the first few months, she had been able to see it transform. Strangely, it had been the first semi-stable home she’d had in a very long time.

In fact, Odessen was significant to her. This planet was where Kiandra and Lana Beniko had built their alliance against the Eternal Throne, an alliance that sired her entire family. Aliana could trace her family back to this very planet. To the derelict base up on the ridge. To the very same ship she slept on right now. Not many people could trace their family back as far as she could. Her family hadn't been particularly notable. Kiandra and Lana were largely forgotten by history, and outside of herself right now the Beniko family hadn't made great achievements or discoveries in the Force.

But their stories mattered to Aliana. They'd been a source of comfort to her for a long time. History might not have found Darth Mecani's relationship with 2V worth remembering, but she did. She loved that story. It wasn't important to historians, but dammit *she* was a historian and it was important to *her*.

"Did you feel this way when you had to leave this base behind, Grandma Kia?" she wondered aloud. "Did you feel like you had accomplished something? Like I did?" It was true, Aliana did accomplish something. She stepped out from the edges of space that her family had been hiding in for centuries. She pulled the rug out from under the entire galaxy and shaped it into something new. Something that had the potential to grow exponentially into something colossal.

But would it stand the test of time? Or would she too fade into obscurity like her ancestors? How soon before Aliana went from the Republic's most wanted woman to being half a footnote in some forgotten archive buried deep in lost ruins? Would her accomplishments even outlive her? She laughed humorlessly, slumping against a nearby wall. "Wow. Here I am, being the most notable Beniko in a millennium and all I can think about is how it all comes apart. Well, if that isn't just kriffed up, I don't know what is."

But if she was being honest to herself, it was hard not to dread fading into obscurity. The Eternal Alliance had once been a superpower to rival the Republic and Resurgent Sith Empire combined. It had the power to influence the third galactic war to its own ends. She was at one point the most powerful Jedi in the galaxy. She had once been a name spoken with soft reverence or trembling fear. And today, the Galaxy had only one question when presented with Darth Caida, Commander of the Eternal Alliance, the Hero of Tython, the Battlemaster of the Jedi Order.

"Who?"

Aliana stood up letting a small piece of rubble tumble out of her hands. Caida may well have been a powerful and accomplished Jedi. But the stars in the night sky stretched far away, and she was gone.

Maybe she would be forgotten by the galaxy one day. Her story just a half-sentence footnote buried in some historical text that nobody would ever read. But if Caida had inspired her, perhaps one day she would inspire her descendants. Perhaps one day, another lost Sith would find comfort and motivation in her tale to keep going. To keep pushing. To not give up. In the same way that reading about her ancestors had quite literally kept her alive.

She smiled at that. If that was to be her fate, then she could imagine no greater honor.

Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

One Year Later
Theed, Naboo - 36 ABY

“*Midwan* I swear you have way too many scrap parts,” Aliana said as she set down the eleventh crate of Rey’s assorted machine parts. She never liked to waste anything, especially not machinery. Always working on her next Speeder upgrade, or modification to the Fury.

“All that says is that I’ve been severely slacking on my work,” Rey says with a smile, carefully laying another crate down beside it. “Idle scrap means idle hands. All this moving stuff has made me negligent.”

“Right,” Aliana said, rolling her eyes. “It’s not like you intentionally scavenge for a surplus of scrap to ensure you never run out. Not at all.”

“I’m recycling!”

“You’re a hoarder!”

“It’s true what they say,” came a deep but soft voice behind them. They turned to see Tiralli carrying in another crate. “You can take the scavenger out of the junkyard, but you can never take the junkyard out of the scavenger.”

Rey scoffed. “Who says that?”

“I did, just now,” Tiralli said. “Where do I put this?”

Aliana pointed to the other orange crates. “Over there, Dad.”

Tiralli nodded, placing his crate down on top of the rest. “You know, if I had known you managed to fit so much in that ship of yours, I would have advised you to get a slightly bigger house. One with at least one more bedroom, maybe.”

“We’ll be alright, sir,” Rey insisted. “Most of this will be on its way out the door as vehicles or equipment.”

“The Empress offered us something palatial near the city center,” Aliana said. “But I wanted something cozier. The bigger they are, the more empty they feel.”

“With that attitude, you should have lived in the forest,” Tiralli chuckled.

“I wanted to. Rey liked Theed,” Aliana said. “This house on the edge of the city was a compromise.”

Tiralli turned to arch a brow at Rey. “*You* wanted to live in the city?”

Rey shrugged. "I mean, nothing like Coruscant or Nar Shadda. That's just suffocating. But I do like the activity and vibrancy that a city could provide."

Tiralli nodded, looking around the small dwelling. After a year of living on the Fury, moving between important communication points in the early Outer Rim sieges, Aliana and Rey had finally decided to settle down once the Sith Empire had anointed itself with its original ten member planets. He'd been surprised to hear they'd chosen Theed to live in, even more surprised when he heard the Dark Lady of the Sith was living in a place so humble. But it was indeed cozy. A small three bedroom dwelling, enough for them and some children. An ideal family home, especially for Aliana who craved a family of her own.

"It's a good house. Tahleea would have loved to live in a place like this," he said.

Aliana smiled as Rey wrapped her arms around her. "You think so?"

"I know so," Tiralli smiled. "...So, where are you on the adoption front?"

"Working on it," Aliana sighed, leaning back against Rey. "The Empress wants us to go to couple's therapy first. Apparently she's concerned that a wartime marriage might be unstable."

Tiralli's brow raised a fraction. Admittedly, couple's therapy was not the first thing that came to mind when he thought of his daughter or her wife. In the time he had known them, they had always seemed so happy. Hell, even news outlets in the core worlds had been calling these two the new power couple of the galaxy. The truth of their love was clear for even their enemies to see. Of course, that was when the threat of defeat and death was constantly looming over them. Now that that was gone, it was entirely possible for things to change between them. With no guarantee that change would be for the better. "I see. Well, I'm sure you both will get through that no problem."

"Thanks, sir," Rey said, squeezing Aliana's waist.

Tiralli chuckled. "Rey, when are you going to stop calling me sir?"

"As soon as I get used to having a father around," Rey said with a bashful giggle. "It will happen soon, I promise."

"I'll hold you to that," Tiralli said. "Do you girls need help unpacking? Getting furniture sorted?"

Aliana lifted her hand, causing five crates to lift into the air. "No, we've got that. Thanks Dad."

"Alright. Let me know it-"

A sudden chiming interjected, prompting Tiralli to look down and pull the holocom off of his belt. He looked at the frequency that blinked on it and frowned. "Oh, hell. I have to take this. Give me a moment."

Rey and Aliana watched as he stepped outside before answering the call, speaking too quietly for either of them to hear. Aliana's eyes scanned around their living room. The larger furniture had already been set up, so she got to appreciate more than just an empty cube. It was coming along. They didn't own much that couldn't be taken off the ship, but with a little time it would feel just as much like home as the Fury did.

"Hey Rey?" she said. "Thanks for talking me into Theed. You were right. It is beautiful."

Rey smiled, craning her neck slightly to peck Aliana's cheek. "You're welcome. And hey. We can take walks through the forests together whenever you want. I would love that with you."

"That sounds lovely," Aliana whispered, reaching up and touching her cheek.

Rey sighed, and kissed her hand. "You're so pretty."

"Oh stop," Aliana said with a bashful giggle, swatting her shoulder.

"Why should I?"

"Because I'm a mess. I'm all sweaty from hefting crates, my braids are coming out and my makeup is smudged," Aliana laughed.

"And you are still an absolute goddess of the Dark Side," Rey said, grinning against the nape of Aliana's neck. "If anything, you looking a bit messy kind of does it for me."

"Of course you'd say-" the last word caught in Aliana's throat as she felt Rey's teeth suddenly graze her neck, the arms around her waist tightening. "R-Rey! My dad's just outside!"

"So should I put a stocking on the door?" Rey growled, her hands slipping up Aliana's shirt.

Aliana groaned and leaned back against her. "I'm serious," she murmured unconvincingly.

"Besides, I'm all sweaty and gross."

"Says the woman who keeps pawing at me everytime I'm done fixing the engine," Rey said with a cheeky growl against Aliana's throat.

"That's different," Aliana said. "Engine oil is part of your scent."

"And I really like your scent right now," Rey purred in between kisses and gentle bites.

Aliana's eyes fluttered closed as she pressed flush against Rey's back, biting her lip as soon as those strong hands began to wander. Stars above, they had spent so much time focusing on the move, her body had begun to miss this even more than usual.

"Okay, but my Dad is still outside," she whined.

"Should I be quick then?" Rey asked. Her fingers tracing the hem of Aliana's breeches. "You've been working so hard lately. You deserve a chance to take the edge off."

Aliana groaned, and then patted Rey's hand. "Shower. Now."

She could feel Rey's grin of victory against her neck before she was lifted off of her feet and carried down the hall.

The last year had been turbulent. Rey and Aliana were trying to take whatever time to themselves they could while the Outer Rim sieges still demanded her attention. It had thankfully gotten to the point where the Empire was established enough that she didn't need to personally oversee the fleet. The Sith Fleet had freed twenty-six worlds, ten of which agreed to join the new Sith Empire. The rest became independent worlds that nonetheless maintained a good relationship with the Sith.

Everything Aliana had once dreamed of, a Sith resurgence and a shelter for the people of the Outer Rim, had become a reality.

Getting to lay down in their bed in their new home for the first time felt like a hard-won reprieve.

“Hey, Rey?” she asked, lifting her head off her chest.

“Yeah?”

“...Can I ask you something... strange?”

“Of course,” Rey said warmly, propping herself up on her elbows to better look at Alie. “Is everything okay?”

“Everything’s fine, it’s just... I’ve noticed over the last year that you kind of just... go along with whatever I’m doing,” Aliana said, draping an arm over Rey’s chest. “The sieges, the Empire... those were all my aspirations. What are yours?”

Rey’s eyes widened slightly, the question visibly taking her by surprise. Her eyes then darted to the side with indecision, her lips pressed into a thin line. “...That’s a fair question,” she said. “One I probably should have put a little more thought into.”

“Do you have any loose ideas?” Aliana asked, leaning forward slightly.

“A few,” Rey said. “I mean, I know I should probably focus on a new Jedi Order and what not. If I don’t get started on that, the Republic certainly will. And I don’t want them deciding what it means to be a Jedi.”

“Then why haven’t I heard anything about it?”

Rey smiled down at her, running her hand through those beautiful curls. “You’re the one who wants to make her mark on the galaxy, Alie. I’m in no rush. I’m only twenty-one, I have plenty of time. For now... I guess I just want to savor this. I got pulled into the Dark Jedi War by chance, and then the Force keeping me there. But all those years on Jakku... *this* was what I dreamed about. My family coming to get me. And I want to treasure it.”

A warm, fluttery feeling made itself known in Aliana’s chest. “Really?”

“Really,” Rey said, raising a hand to caress Aliana’s cheek. “I wanted to help you get what you wanted, because you already gave me what I wanted. *This* .”

“And... you’re happy with just that?” Aliana asked.

Rey noticed the almost timid look in Aliana’s eye. Was... was she feeling self-conscious about being more ambitious than her? She could feel the tinge of anxiety that rippled off of her. “Alie, what’s wrong?”

Aliana shook her head and laid her head back down. “Nothing, just... don’t want to think I’m... stifling you.”

Rey’s brow furrowed at that. This was... odd behavior. But not insurmountable. Aliana had been self-conscious about her role in their relationship before. All those declarations from Republic talk shows accusing her of domestic abuse probably didn’t help, even if she knew that they just wanted

to fuel the narrative that she'd corrupted the last of the Jedi. But even before then, Aliana had a tendency to overperform. Something that Rey had once allowed her to do without thinking of the consequences.

That seemed so long ago. She could barely remember the exact conversation she'd had with Poe, all she knew that it was a turning point for them. A turning point that probably saved their relationship. And yet, Aliana's anxieties and self-doubt hadn't quite left. Perhaps the Empress was right to suggest therapy. Maybe it really would be good for both of them. For now, she wrapped her arms tighter around Aliana and pressed a kiss to her forehead.



“Aliana Beniko, I have never felt more free and alive than I have with you,” she said. “In a sea of people trying to push me onto their preferred path, you’re the only one who encouraged me to seek my own. Well I found it. And I’m very happy with it.”

Aliana’s hand curled into fists around some of the sheets covering them. “You mean it?”

“I would never lie to you, *Shâsot*,” Rey said softly. “And I know that wherever I go or whatever I do, you will still be there. That makes me happier than you realize.”

Aliana relaxed and snuggled closer. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

The two of them nestled deeper under the covers, the cold breeze of Theed making them all the more inviting. A year of taking a hands off approach to war, of letting the Admirals handle the day to day stresses of an assault, had been good for them. But as Aliana had aptly demonstrated, they had a ways to go on their own yet. But they would get there. Very soon.

For now, they could just rest and treasure their time with each other.

And there was not a thing the Force could promise Rey that sounded more tantalizing than that.

THE END

Chapter End Notes

And this brings us to the end of The Sith Resurgence. It's been a very fun and fulfilling three years. What started as an idea to give Rey a Sith girlfriend out of spite turned into something that the both of us are very proud of. It's not only been creatively satisfying to make, it's been the catalyst to re-examine a lot of ourselves, our interests, our biases, and grow as both people and creators. Hell, we got married while we were writing this. This story will always have a special place in our hearts and we hope it has a special place in yours.

Thanks for reading.

~Lily and Mikaila Orchard

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